

**THE USE OF RHETORICAL ANALYSIS ON IMPROVING THE PREACHING  
OF OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVES IN CHINESE CHURCHES**

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**To Linda - my wife, best friend and love**

## CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING	1
Introduction	1
Project Thesis	4
CHAPTER 2: BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK	8
The Value of Preaching the Old Testament	8
The Value of Preaching Old Testament Narratives	13
The Value of Using Stories to Teach/Influence	19
Conclusion	26
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW	28
Preaching/Teaching from the Old Testament	28
Exegeting the Hebrew Narratives with the Literary/Rhetorical Analysis	32
Preparing Sermons from Biblical Narratives	36
Conclusion	39
CHAPTER 4: PROJECT DESIGN	40
Design of the Teaching Materials	41
Assignments	42
Student Evaluation Form	44
The Trainees	45
Summary	46
CHAPTER 5: OUTCOMES	47
Evaluation of Sermon Outlines	47
Summary of Student Feedback	55
Conclusions and Recommendations	57
APPENDICES	60
BIBLIOGRAPHY	88
VITA	91

## TABLES

Table 1: Sermon Outlines on Nine Old Testament Stories Sampled from Four Chinese Churches in North America	60
Table 2: Personal Data of Students Attended the Training Course	77
Table 3: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on Genesis 22:1-19 from Group I Students	78
Table 4: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on Joshua 3-4 from Group II Students	79
Table 5: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on Joshua 9:1-27 from Group III Students	80
Table 6: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on Ruth from Group IV Students	81
Table 7: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11 from Group V Students	82
Table 8: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on 1 Samuel 3:1-21 from Group VI Students	83
Table 9: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on 1 Samuel 25:1-42 from Group VII Students	84
Table 10: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on Daniel 1 from Group VIII Students	85
Table 11: Sermon Outlines from Groups I to VIII after the Training Course	86
Table 12: Summary Data of Student Ratings on the Training Course	87

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## **ABSTRACT**

Evangelical Christians believe that the entire Bible is the inspired word of God to His people. But in practice, there seems to be some disparity in expressing such a conviction. The first thirty-nine books, the Old Testament, do not share the same level of exposure as the latter twenty-seven books, the New Testament, in the pulpit ministry of the church. Such has been my personal experience ever since my conversion twenty-eight years ago. To be sure, I did learn about the Old Testament, but mostly in the classroom setting. The Old Testament seems to be important in providing historical knowledge, including many stories. But whenever these stories were presented, either in classroom or from the pulpit, they did not capture my attention and imagination the way stories typically would.

Such a personal experience became a big problem after I was called into full-time Christian ministry. Learning to preach from the Old Testament, particularly the historical books, is an urgent matter, not just for me, but also for my fellow co-laborers in the Lord. I believe that the literary/rhetorical approach in interpreting the Bible by paying attention to the unique features of the narrative genre may help bridge the gap. This thesis is my journey of such a pursuit. On this journey, I hope to draw others to appreciate and to enjoy preaching the Old Testament narratives.

## Chapter 1

### The Problem and Its Setting

#### Introduction

The current preaching condition in the Chinese churches may be providing an unbalanced diet for the members due to the neglect and mishandling of Old Testament narratives. This is true for two reasons.

First, Chinese preachers usually do not preach from the Old Testament. Various examples prove this, the first being a survey of my home church, Rutgers Community Christian Church (RCCC) in Somerset, New Jersey. Only about 25% of the sermons preached over a forty-six week period in 2005 were based on Old Testament passages.<sup>1</sup> RCCC conducts seven worship services each weekend.<sup>2</sup> Out of the 322 sermons preached in 2005, 85 of them were based on Old Testament, and I contributed 15 of these 85. The other 11 speakers (pastors as well as lay elders) preached a total of 70 sermons from the Old Testament over the forty-six week period.

Another set of examples confirms the validity of my contention. I traced the

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<sup>1</sup> There are several factors behind the choosing of RCCC's sermons for this initial analysis, besides the fact that I am one of the pastoral team here. RCCC is a relatively young church, established in September of 1979, thus without a rigid church tradition yet. RCCC's congregation has a diverse background. The founding members came from different churches: Baptist, the Little Flock group (heavily influenced by Watchman Nee) and a church in Taiwan with some Pietist movement background. The current pastoral staff also has diversified theological training: Trinity Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary, Biblical Theological Seminary, Alliance Theological Seminary, Concordia Theological Seminary, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, China Evangelical Seminary (Taiwan) and Alliance Bible Seminary (Hong Kong).

<sup>2</sup> There is no fixed pattern of the sermons preached in these multiple services. Sometimes, no sermon was repeated at all in each service; and sometimes, one sermon might be preached in a couple of services over the same weekend (or in different weekends).



sermon records of three other Chinese churches in America in the period from January 2005 to April 2006: a non-denominational church in Lexington, Massachusetts; a Southern Baptist church in Austin, Texas; and an Evangelical Free church in Alhambra, California.<sup>3</sup> The portions of sermons based on Old Testament passages in these three churches were 27%, 17% and 16% respectively.

Furthermore, the neglect of the Old Testament seems to occur in China as well as in America. In March 2006, I had the opportunity to provide training to house church leaders in China in two different geographical areas, one at a major city in the north and another in the south. A total of forty-seven preachers from different house church systems attended these trainings. I asked these preachers to give an estimate of the percentage of messages based on Old Testament materials in their churches. The response ranged from 5% to 30%, consistent with the finding based on the above research data.<sup>4</sup>

Besides neglect, a second factor contributing to the problem of preaching Old Testament narratives is that when preachers in Chinese churches do preach from the Old Testament narratives, the sermons tend not to be relevant to contemporary

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<sup>3</sup> These three churches are: Chinese Bible Church of Greater Boston ([atlantic.cbcbg.org](http://atlantic.cbcbg.org)), Hyde Park Chinese Baptist Church ([www.hpcbc.org](http://www.hpcbc.org)) and Chinese Evangelical Free Church ([www.cefc.org](http://www.cefc.org)).

<sup>4</sup> The neglect of preaching from the Old Testament is not a problem for the Chinese churches only. In describing the neglect of the Hebrew Bible, Lubeck states that “at least 75 percent of the sermons that I personally have heard (at least those which were primarily expository in focus to begin with) have been based on New Testament passages.” See Ray Lubeck, “Dusting Off the Old Testament for a New Millennium,” in *Preaching to A Shifting Culture*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 20.

Christians. To illustrate this, consider nine sermons based on Old Testament narratives preached by nine different speakers, five at RCCC and the rest from the other three Chinese churches mentioned above. Table 1 (Appendix A) lists the texts and outlines of these sermons. Seven of the nine sermons were structured to address the audience with events of the past, concerning others: things happened to Hannah, the Lord's Ark, Moses, Abraham, Balaam, Ruth and Gideon.<sup>5</sup> These messages, while containing information derived from the Bible, do not constitute preaching when measured by their relevancy or applicability to the contemporary hearers. As Robinson states:

Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.<sup>6</sup>

Based on this definition, expository preaching requires the preacher to discover and to communicate not just the facts of the passage, but the biblical text's central concept. Furthermore, the preacher needs to make proper application, consistent with the text's central idea, first to himself/herself, then to the audience.

Chapell agrees, insisting that a well-constructed sermon has three obligations: unity, purpose, and application. To emphasize the necessity of relevant applications in a sermon, he states:

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<sup>5</sup> There is no tense distinction for verbs in Chinese language. But, the outlines can still indicate that the main points are constructed around events concerning others.

<sup>6</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 21.

A sermon is not a textual summary, a systematics discourse, or a history lecture. Mere lectures are *pre-sermons* because they dispense information without relevant application that focuses listeners on their obligations to Christ and his ministry to them.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Adams distinguishes the preaching stance from the lecturing stance.<sup>8</sup>

The lecturer speaks to the congregation *about* the Bible, but the pastor speaks to the congregation *about* themselves *from* the Bible.

In light of leading homileticians' conviction concerning relevant application, eighty percent of the sermons in Table 1 fail to address the modern hearers effectively. They stop short of providing the listeners with important application of the biblical concept. Perhaps there is application sprinkled here and there, but the overall thrust of these messages is more informational than practical, more lecture-like than preaching.

To sum up the problem, Chinese preachers usually do not preach from the Old Testament narratives, and when they do so, the sermons tend to be irrelevant to contemporary Christians. Therefore, the research question of this project is: How can the present condition of neglect and mishandling of Old Testament narratives in the Chinese churches be addressed?

### **Project Thesis**

The Scripture declares itself to be effective, powerful and sufficient.<sup>9</sup> This fact is

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<sup>7</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 47.

<sup>8</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Preaching With Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 43.

<sup>9</sup> For example, see Isaiah 55:10-11, Jeremiah 23:29 and Hebrews 4:12.

the foundation for Christian preaching. In *Famine in the Land*, Lawson makes a passionate call for expository preaching today by demonstrating the effect of biblical preaching in saving the lost in Jonah's ministry,<sup>10</sup> as well as in nurturing the life of Christ's church in the example of apostles' teaching.<sup>11</sup> Lawson also argues that the Scripture's sufficiency requires the preacher to be faithful to the biblical text in preaching.<sup>12</sup> To interpret the Bible faithfully, evangelicals have used the grammatico-historical method from the Reformation tradition.

However, my research described above has shown that sermons on Old Testament narratives preached in Chinese churches do not necessarily exhibit the Scripture's characteristics of being effective and powerful. While most of the nine sermons in Table 1 did convey correct information from the biblical text, yet they seemed to be lacking in the life impacting power as expected of the preaching from God's word. Therefore, there is a need of developing a method of rediscovering the dynamics of the biblical text.

Recent scholars have introduced a literary and rhetorical approach in interpreting the Bible by paying attention to the unique features of each genre in the Bible. The interpreter should focus not only on *what* the text says, but also *how* the text works in

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<sup>10</sup> Steve J. Lawson, *Famine in the Land* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 69.

<sup>11</sup> Lawson, 45.

<sup>12</sup> Lawson, 81-82; also see John R.W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 58.

communicating its message.<sup>13</sup> In other words, a preacher should examine and take advantage of the rhetorical functions of the text in his/her preparation as well as final delivery of the sermon. I believe that such study, while not a complete solution by itself, can help alleviate the problem described above concerning preaching the Old Testament narratives in Chinese churches. Accordingly, my thesis is: The neglect and mishandling of Old Testament narratives in Chinese churches can be improved by training the Chinese pastors to apply rhetorical analysis to the biblical text in sermon preparation.

To argue this thesis, I establish in Chapter 2 the biblical/theological foundation for preaching Old Testament narratives in the Christian church. Research from the New Testament establishes the importance of Old Testament for Christian's faith and life. I also include literature research to further strengthen the theological ground of preaching the Old Testament narratives today.

In Chapter 3, I survey the literature concerning issues of preaching from the Old Testament, and summarize research on the literary and rhetorical criticism on Old Testament narratives as well as on preaching Biblical narratives.

In Chapter 4, I present the design of a training course to train Chinese pastors to apply rhetorical analysis to biblical narratives in preparing and delivering sermons. The

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<sup>13</sup> I will introduce these works in the literature review in chapter 3.

teaching materials incorporate the insights gained from the literature research in Chapter 3. I also provide suggested areas of improvement from a more detailed analysis of the sermons on Old Testament narratives collected in Chinese churches in terms of how sermons should be sensitive to the rhetorical functions of narrative genre. The teaching materials will consist of the following parts: 1. The importance of preaching Old Testament narratives, 2. Interpreting Biblical narratives, 3. Preaching Biblical narratives, and 4. Illustrative sermons. This project also involves a field test for preliminary evaluation.

Finally, Chapter 5 presents the outcome of this project and future recommendations.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Biblical/Theological Framework**

Now that the problem and its setting have been described in Chapter 1, I turn to the Biblical/theological framework under-girding this thesis. This chapter will present an argument for the value of preaching Old Testament narratives today based on biblical evidence and/or theological grounds.

The argument will proceed in three steps: first, the value of preaching the Old Testament in general; second, the value of preaching Old Testament narratives in particular; third, the value of using story (even non-biblical ones) to teach/influence the audience due to the beguiling form of story which further explains and supports the significance of preaching Old Testament narratives in Christian churches today.

#### **The Value of Preaching the Old Testament**

The Christian Bible is composed of two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament, separated by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. A Christian (or any reader) would naturally encounter the Old Testament first when he/she approaches the Bible. The Old Testament is also the major portion of the Bible, three times the size of the New Testament.<sup>14</sup> These facts serve to show in an implicit way the importance of Old Testament. Indeed, many New Testament references explicitly point to the Old

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<sup>14</sup> Lubeck rightly points out the serious issue at stake behind the practice that “any person can go to the local Christian bookstore and purchase a New Testament alone, or New Testament with Psalms (and perhaps Proverbs).” See Lubeck, 20.

Testament as the foundation for Christian faith in providing the proper knowledge about Jesus Christ as well as the proper teachings of Christian living.

Jesus himself emphasized the essential role of Old Testament Scriptures in knowing him. On one occasion, the Jews wanted to kill Jesus because he not only performed healings on the Sabbath but also called God his own Father. In answering the Jews, Jesus said, “You diligently study the Scripture because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. . . . But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believe Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”<sup>15</sup> Jesus’ statement here shows that the Old Testament provides the necessary interpretive framework of his deed and personhood.

In quite a different situation, Jesus made his post-resurrection appearance to two of his distressed disciples on the way to Emmaus, and “he said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”<sup>16</sup> In another post-resurrection appearance of Jesus, Luke records

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<sup>15</sup> John 5: 39-47.

<sup>16</sup> Luke 24: 25-27.



that “he said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.”<sup>17</sup> Jesus’ appeal to the Old Testament after his resurrection further demonstrates the Old Testament’s foundational role in knowing who Jesus is.

Other New Testament references state the essential role of the Old Testament for Christian faith. Writing to the Corinthian church, Paul addressed the absolute importance of the doctrine of Christ’s resurrection in the final section of the letter. He writes, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve.”<sup>18</sup> The trustworthiness of the message concerning Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection is grounded in the Scriptures, the Old Testament. Paul also wrote to Timothy, encouraging him to persevere in the faith: “But as for you, continued in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”<sup>19</sup> These two

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<sup>17</sup> Luke 24: 44-45.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 15: 3-5.

<sup>19</sup> 2 Timothy 3: 14-15.

examples affirm the place of the Old Testament in sustaining believers' faith in Jesus.

New Testament references show that the Old Testament is indispensable for the proper understanding and faith in Jesus. Many biblical scholars agree with this assessment. For example, Greidanus encourages pastors to preach from the Old Testament (as well as the New). He states, likening God's redemptive history to a drama with many acts, "Just as one cannot understand the last act of a drama without knowing the earlier acts, so this climatic act of God sending his Son cannot be understood without knowing the foregoing acts of God."<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, Achtemeier lists three reasons why the Old Testament is essential for understanding and appropriating the Christian faith:

In the first place, apart from the Old Testament, it is almost impossible properly to understand the nature of the world. . . . Second, apart from the Old Testament, it is almost impossible properly to understand ourselves as human beings. . . . Third, apart from the Old Testament, we also cannot properly understand who God is – that he is not identifiable with or found in anything in all creation, but that he is *holy* God, uniquely other than everything he has made.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to proper salvation knowledge, the Old Testament is also essential for proper living of God's people. Paul wrote to Timothy that "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good

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<sup>20</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 27.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 21-22.

work.”<sup>22</sup> Paul’s statement here is particularly important for our understanding of the Old Testament’s on-going relevancy for Christians today. The Old Testament continues to be indispensable even after pointing someone to Christ Jesus in that it provides believers in Christ with the basic teachings of a godly life. In other words, Christians have much to learn from the Old Testament. Kaiser points out the Old Testament’s value in dealing with many questions about human life:

The scope of the Old Testament’s teaching on the great questions of life is extremely broad and startling in its practicality. It covers everything from questions of human dignity and treatment of the environment in the opening chapters of Genesis to the nature and purpose of marital love in the Song of Solomon and a theology of culture in the Book of Ecclesiastes.<sup>23</sup>

Lubeck makes the same argument, but from a negative point of view, that the neglect of Hebrew Bible would impoverish our worldview about humanity’s origin, purpose on earth, and destiny. He then concludes:

Each of these elements is of crucial importance to our self-understanding and to our concept of God, which rightly ought to affect the *ethics* of our contemporary, day-to-day lived experience. Thus if the Christian’s worldview is deficient because of lack of knowledge of the truth revealed by God in the Hebrew Bible, then what is at stake is nothing less than how that person views *everything* in life.<sup>24</sup>

In summary, the Old Testament is essential for Christian faith in that it provides the proper knowledge about Jesus Christ as well as the proper teachings of Christian

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<sup>22</sup> 2 Timothy 3: 16-17.

<sup>23</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 23.

<sup>24</sup> Lubeck, 26.

living. Sailhamer describes the Old Testament's foundational role this way:

To acknowledge the loyalty between the Old and the New Testaments, then, is not to do so at the expense of the wholeness and meaningfulness of the Old Testament in its own right. . . . There is a true distinction between the Old and the New Testaments and each can be considered in its own right, though neither would retain its identity alone. The Old Testament not only stands on its own, but the New Testament stands on its shoulders.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, preaching from the Old Testament is valuable today. Small wonder that there are urgent calls for the Christian preachers to preach from the Old Testament faithfully and properly.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Value of Preaching Old Testament Narratives**

Having established the importance of preaching the Old Testament in general, I will now present the argument about the value of preaching Old Testament narratives in particular. Again, the fact that narrative is the dominant genre in the Old Testament speaks implicitly about its importance. When reading the Old Testament, we are naturally confronted with the preponderance of stories in it. Evangelical scholars recognize the significance of Old Testament stories. Fee and Stuart estimate that more than 40 percent of the Hebrew Bible is narrative, and they state, "It is our presupposition that the Holy Spirit knew what he was doing when he inspired so much of the Bible in the form of narrative. We think it is obvious that this type of literature

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<sup>25</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 23.

<sup>26</sup> Greidanus, 25-32; Kaiser, 15-28.

serves God's revelatory purpose well."<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, the importance of Old Testament narrative derives not only from its quantity. Many New Testament evidences indicate that Jesus and early Christians used Old Testament stories to teach about the gospel message and other important issues or doctrines.

Jesus himself referred to Old Testament stories frequently in his teachings. He used the Old Testament stories to achieve a variety of purposes. On one occasion, he faced the Pharisees' criticism concerning his disciples' picking and eating grain on the Sabbath. Jesus responded by recalling the story of David and David's companion eating the consecrated bread, a story narrated in 1 Samuel 21: 1-6. He then went on, saying "I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."<sup>28</sup> Jesus used the story in 1 Samuel 21:1-6 to teach the true meaning of Sabbath and more importantly who he is. The ancient story about David's receiving help in times of trouble should help the audience understanding the mercy of God, particularly manifested in the person of Jesus.

On another occasion, some Pharisees and teachers of the Law demanded from

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<sup>27</sup> Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 78.

<sup>28</sup> See Matthew 12: 1-8; also Mark 2: 23-28, Luke 6: 1-5.

Jesus a miraculous sign. Jesus replied with two stories in the Old Testament. One was about Jonah, his being in the belly of a fish three days and nights, as well as Nineveh's repentance after Jonah's preaching. The other story was about Solomon and the Queen of the South listening to Solomon's wisdom, in 1 Kings 10:1-10 (and also 2 Chronicles 9:1-9). Again, Jesus used these two stories to show who he is: "So the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. . . . and now one greater than Jonah is here. . . . and now one greater than Solomon is here."<sup>29</sup> The past events about God's extending grace to the gentiles (the Ninevites and the Queen of the South) were used to point to Jesus' ministry, perhaps hinting at the preaching of the gospel to the gentiles after the persistent resistance from the Jews.<sup>30</sup> So, these ancient stories were also used to call for repentance now. Furthermore, Jonah's experience in the belly of a fish alluded to Jesus' death before resurrection.

Besides Jesus' examples, there are many other New Testament usages of the Old Testament stories in preaching the gospel. In Acts, we find that the early Christian's evangelistic messages included many stories in the Old Testament. Stephen's speech is one example, including stories of Abraham, Joseph, Moses and the exodus.<sup>31</sup> Another example is Paul's speech in Pisidian Antioch. Paul began with the exodus, through the

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<sup>29</sup> Matthew 12: 38-42; also Luke 11: 29-32.

<sup>30</sup> See Matthew 11:20-24; 12:14; 12:24.

<sup>31</sup> Acts 7.

conquering of Canaan, the period of judges, to the establishing of David as king.<sup>32</sup> In these evangelistic messages, we see that God's redemptive acts of the past (the Old Testament stories) are important for the audience to understand the climatic act of God's sending His Son, Jesus.

The apostles also referred to Old Testament narratives to teach important doctrines concerning the gospel in their writings. Paul quoted the stories of Isaac and Jacob in discussing the doctrine of God's sovereignty in election.<sup>33</sup> The historical event concerning Abraham's two wives (Sarah and Hagar) and their sons is used to demonstrate the difference between the promise and the law, freedom and enslavement.<sup>34</sup>

The above examples have demonstrated the value of Old Testament stories in preaching the gospel, calling people to faith in Jesus Christ. Longman explains how Old Testament history serves the purpose of calling people to obedience to God:

Today history is often wrongly thought to be a simple record of past events. Historians, however, are fully aware that it is impossible to report the facts of history apart from some kind of interpretive framework. Biblical history is no different. It does not simply register events; it provides an interpretive framework to guide our understanding of those events and to motivate us to a certain course of action. In this way, history becomes a stimulus to obedience toward God. As we recognize this function of biblical history, we become

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<sup>32</sup> Acts 13: 13-41.

<sup>33</sup> Romans 9: 6-18.

<sup>34</sup> Galatians 4: 21-31.

aware of our responsibility to apply the Old Testament to life.<sup>35</sup>

Achtemeier urges the church to take advantage of the biblical stories' vividness, the power of language and the mystery they carry with them in communicating to the world about God:

It is through the language and pictures of these stories that we come to know who God is. And when we lose these stories, we lose our God of mystery and power and otherness. No wonder our secular age can live in a world in which it never sees God at work.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to pointing to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the Old Testament stories were also used in the New Testament to teach many other important issues about human life. Jesus referred to Old Testament stories to answer ethical questions. Facing the Pharisees' test concerning the issue of divorce, Jesus appealed to neither the law of Moses nor the contemporary practices of his day. Instead, Jesus answered by recalling the story of creation and the event of Adam and Eve's marriage as narrated in Genesis 1 and 2, "At the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one.'" Jesus then concluded, "So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."<sup>37</sup> The historical act of God's creation, not any compromised positions due to man's fallen condition, should

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<sup>35</sup> Tremper Longman, *Making Sense of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 126-127.

<sup>36</sup> Achtemeier, 17.

<sup>37</sup> See Matthew 19: 1-12; Mark 10: 1-12.



determine human beings' ethical value and behavior.

The apostles also used many Old Testament stories in their writings. In a letter to the Corinth church, Paul cited several events during the exodus to exhort the Christians in Corinth to be careful lest they fall.<sup>38</sup> Paul referred to the specific creation act of God and the historical fall to establish church order concerning woman.<sup>39</sup> James pointed to Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac as well as Rahab's hospitality to the spies to argue that true faith must be accompanied by corresponding deeds.<sup>40</sup> Peter warned false teachers of his day by recalling the horrible judgment in the day of Noah and the story of Balaam.<sup>41</sup> It is clear that Old Testament stories continue to be meaningful to Christians in that these stories shed light on important doctrines and impact Christian living.

The Old Testament narrative is not just a story of the past, but contains truth to be learned by Christians now. In the letter to the Corinthians, Paul explicitly says, "Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. . . . These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come."<sup>42</sup> Lubeck describes

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<sup>38</sup> 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13.

<sup>39</sup> 1 Timothy 2: 11-15; also see 1 Corinthians 11: 3-16.

<sup>40</sup> James 2: 14-26.

<sup>41</sup> 2 Peter 2.

<sup>42</sup> 1 Corinthians 10: 6-11.

the timelessness of biblical stories by saying:

Biblical narratives are not merely true because they accurately record what happened in the past, but also because they depict patterns about reality – these stories teach us truths about the interrelationship of people and God. There is something timelessly and universally true which is implicit in these narratives so that our personal lives will benefit as we correctly identify and relate these lessons to our own lives.<sup>43</sup>

The above analysis has shown the value of preaching Old Testament narratives today. The Old Testament contains a rich source of stories, and these Old Testament stories are useful in preaching the gospel as well as teaching important issues or doctrines for Christians today.

### **The Value of Using Stories to Teach/Influence**

Finally, I would like to argue for the value of using stories to teach or influence the audience. By this I mean stories in general, including but not limited to biblical stories. There are great advantages and opportunities in using stories for teaching as stories have a universal appeal. Furthermore, we find many biblical characters, including Jesus, using stories effectively for a variety of purposes, whether answering a question, making a request, or rebuking.

Storytelling is found in every culture. Children grow up in the world of stories. Even adults find stories appealing. Every preacher (or communicator) knows the effect of story. In our messages, we often blend in stories, or story-like elements. We call

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<sup>43</sup> Lubeck, 32.

them *illustrations*. We have all experienced how the simple announcement, “Let me give you an illustration,” may heighten the listeners’ attention. Ryken says it well, “One of the most universal human impulses can be summed up in a familiar four-word plea: Tell me a story. The Bible constantly satisfies that demand.”<sup>44</sup>

Story’s three basic elements, plot, character and setting, work together dynamically to create an appealing effect. We observe and get to know the characters as we follow along the plot line. At the same time, the characters’ actions, speech and interactions develop the plot. A story also unfolds in its setting which provides sights, noises and even smells, further impacting our emotions. We are thus drawn into the story. Achtemeier describes how stories can easily capture our attentions:

Stories have the character of allowing us to enter into them. We identify with the figures in them and find them telling the story of our lives. And this is one of the functions of the stories in the Bible – they let us enter into their events, to experience and feel what has happened, so that the story becomes our story and the happening an event in our situation.<sup>45</sup>

The story’s elements are useful not only in drawing the audience into the story’s world, but also in teachings. For example, a story’s plot engages the audience. The basic structure of a plot contains the background information (or exposition), the initial conflict (or crisis), the escalation, the climax, and finally the resolution (or denouement). The development of the plot line creates a sense of suspense that keeps

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<sup>44</sup> Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 35.

<sup>45</sup> Achtemeier, 15.

the audience interested. Furthermore, an ‘old’ story’s plot still engages the hearers.

Arthurs attributes the attention-gripping effect of a story told many times to the formal structure of plot:

The attention-sustaining power of a re-run occurs in part because of the formal qualities of plot. While there is no suspense, there is still movement from disequilibrium to resolution, and audiences find that movement satisfying. Hearing an Old Testament narrative for the fourth time is like listening to the same piece of music four times. The satisfying experience of rhythm, dynamics, and chord progression is undiminished despite the lack of suspense.<sup>46</sup>

As the plot engages the audience, it also teaches. Following the plot line may lead the audience to reflect upon the many complicated struggles in the real world.

Middleton and Walsh propose that there are four basic worldview questions: Where are we? Who are we? What’s wrong? What’s the remedy? They then suggest that narrative material, due to its nature, can answer these basic questions well:

The formal structure of enplotment thus makes narratives perfect vehicles for exploring the worldview questions What’s wrong? And What’s the remedy? Whereas the introduction of plot conflict formally corresponds to the problem of evil, the movement toward resolution corresponds to redemption. . . . But two other typical dimensions of narrative are important also for worldview analysis, namely *character* and *setting*. These might be seen to correspond to the questions Who are we? and Where are we? This shows just how inextricably the four worldview questions are interrelated.<sup>47</sup>

A story’s character also has its unique effect of teaching. While observing the

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<sup>46</sup> Jeffrey D. Arthurs, “Preaching the Old Testament Narratives,” in *Preaching the Old Testament*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 76.

<sup>47</sup> Richard J. Middleton & Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 64.

story unfolding, readers begin to identify with certain characters and are thus involved in the story. Yet, such identification is more than an emotional experience. As a reader chooses to sympathize or disdain or identify with certain characters in the story, he or she also begins to absorb certain ideas, values or concepts. Johnston argues that the story's effect is more than creating a vicarious experience but also communicating propositional ideas:

Think about it: How many adults in the church services pay better attention during the children's story time than during the sermon? Stories put us in touch with people on a level of shared humanity. Story-telling can grab the listener's imagination and help people identify with an idea in a way that triggers significance and meaning.<sup>48</sup>

Setting, story's third feature, also has both the effects of appealing and teaching. Setting provides the time and place of the story, prompting the audience's imagination and thus evoking emotional responses. In other words, setting makes the story come alive. At the same time, setting helps to communicate certain meanings of the story. This is particularly true with biblical narratives, as each story in the Bible is part of the grand story concerning God's redemptive act of humanity. Arthurs explains this rhetorical function, association, by saying:

Although written by scores of people over thousands of years, it [the Bible] remains a cohesive, self-reflective constellation of meanings. Part alludes to other parts, and authors count on readers to catch the allusions, understanding individual narratives in light of the meta-narrative of redemptive history. . . . Through associations, the narrators communicate theology, but once again,

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<sup>48</sup> Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 155.

their craft is subtle. They embody ideas in persons and places.<sup>49</sup>

Story, due to its unique features, is an appealing and effective medium for communicating ideas. Stories have been used to teach or influence people in all walks of life. Borden keenly observes that:

More people in the culture are influenced, not by the papers and books of the philosophers, ethicists, or commentators, but rather by the artistic communication of their ideas in the media. While people are laughing, crying and identifying with real-life stories in drama and music, they are adopting values that contribute to a declining cultural morality. In other words, it is the stories and the ideas taught by stories that influence people more often than the scholarly presentations of those same ideas articulated in speeches and papers.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, Mathewson challenges the preachers to face the reality that:

When preachers open up the text of Scripture each Sunday morning, they face twenty-first century audiences who are programmed to think in stories. They speak to people who unknowingly get their theology from stories they've watched on HBO or MTV.<sup>51</sup>

The value of using stories to teach can be found in the Bible. Many biblical characters told stories in order to communicate effectively in many different situations. Our master himself has set the example. Jesus frequently used stories in his teachings. It has been estimated that one third of Jesus' teachings in the Synoptic Gospels were in the form of parable, and there were many extended stories in Jesus' parables.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Arthurs, 84.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Borden, "Is There Really One Big Idea in that Story?" in *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Keith Willhite and Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 69.

<sup>51</sup> Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 19-20.

<sup>52</sup> Brian C. Stiller, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 9.

To answer a certain lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbor," Jesus did not give an abstract answer. Rather, he told the story of the Good Samaritan.<sup>53</sup> In facing the criticism of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law about his apparent acceptance of sinners, Jesus told not one parable, but three: the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son.<sup>54</sup> Jesus' purpose of using these stories was not to divert the question or criticism of his opponents, but to influence, challenge or even change the hearers. After hearing the story of the Good Samaritan, the lawyer had to give an answer in agreement with what Jesus intended: "The one who had mercy on him." With the story of the Prodigal Son, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law heard the calling for repentance as the elder son in the story. Jesus obviously knew the power of storytelling. Lewis and Lewis suggest that Jesus' effectiveness in drawing people is due to his people-centered preaching which is related to Jesus' frequent usage of stories.<sup>55</sup>

We can also find other biblical characters using story to communicate. Jotham, the only surviving son of Jerub-Baal, used a story (or fable) concerning trees (the olive, the fig, the vine and the thorn bush) to mock the event of Abimelech being crowned as king.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps more familiar to us is the prophet Nathan's story about a rich man's

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<sup>53</sup> Luke 10: 29-37.

<sup>54</sup> Luke 15:1-32.

<sup>55</sup> Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *Learning to Preach Like Jesus* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1989), 15-34.

<sup>56</sup> Judges 9: 1-20.

forceful taking of a poor man's only little ewe lamb, before Nathan pronounced the Lord's judgment on David concerning David's adultery with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of Uriah.<sup>57</sup> Another case is the wise woman from Tekoa. She followed Joab's advice, telling a made-up story to David, about her dilemma of facing the threat of losing her only surviving son. She then turned the story to an opportunity of pleading with David to allow Absalom returning to Jerusalem.<sup>58</sup> In the events relating to David, the rhetorical power of stories was apparent. David disdained the rich man. As a result, he had to accept Nathan's pronouncement of the Lord's judgment.<sup>59</sup> David identified with the woman from Tekoa. Consequently, he had to consent with the request for Absalom's return.<sup>60</sup> Stories were used effectively, to rebuke, to challenge or to make an urgent plead.

Contemporary Christian communicators agree with the contention that stories are effective in teaching and influencing people. Leighton Ford cites a living example that how the story of Moses in Exodus 4 transformed Melvin Graham to offer himself to serve God even though Melvin had always felt overshadowed by his famous brother Billy Graham.<sup>61</sup> While cautioning the overemphasis of preaching narratives, Larsen

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<sup>57</sup> 2 Samuel 12: 1-4; see 2 Samuel 11-12 for the entire event.

<sup>58</sup> 2 Samuel 14: 1-24.

<sup>59</sup> See 2 Samuel 12: 5-6; 13.

<sup>60</sup> See 2 Samuel 14: 8; 19-21.

<sup>61</sup> Leighton Ford, *The Power of Story* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1994), 9-10.



does agree that there are many positive factors associated with it, including the inductive sermon form, the attention to various literary genres, as well as the balance between propositional revelation and personal encounter.<sup>62</sup> Jensen's comment below reveals the close relationship between storytelling and gospel-telling:

Stories are universally human modes of communication. There has never been a time in human history when stories have not been shared among human beings as a way of coming to terms with life in time and space. Stories are popular among us today. The Bible is essentially a story book. Preaching that is faithful to the Bible and faithful to shared human history and experience will find room for the storytellers art. Communicating the gospel via the medium of storytelling is not a luxury that we might choose to adopt. Storytelling and gospel-telling are inextricably wrapped up with one another.<sup>63</sup>

Story, due to its universal appeal, is valuable in transmitting ideas. Furthermore, the value of story in teaching and influencing people has been recognized by many biblical characters' effective usage of stories in a variety of situations.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the above interaction with the New Testament Scriptures and contemporary scholars' writings has demonstrated the value of preaching the Old Testament in general, the value of preaching Old Testament narratives in particular, and the value of using stories (including but not limited to biblical stories) to teach and influence the audience. The above argument forms the Biblical/theological framework

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<sup>62</sup> David L. Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995), 20-24.

<sup>63</sup> Richard A. Jensen, *Telling the Story* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 126.

for this thesis project. The lessons learned from this project may also shed light on the art of preaching narrative materials in general, that is, including the stories in the New Testament.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Literature Review**

In this chapter, I present the literature review concerning issues of preaching Old Testament narratives. I divide this literature research into three categories. The first section deals with the preaching/teaching from the Old Testament in Christian churches today. The second section is about exegeting the Hebrew narratives with the literary and rhetorical approach. The last section presents a review of literature on the subject of preparing sermons from biblical narratives.

#### **Preaching/Teaching from the Old Testament**

To preach from the Old Testament, we face a question of how to bridge the gap between the ancient Old Testament world and our own time. This question is particularly serious when we consider the issue of how to preach Christ from the Old Testament. The following literature review is based on recent scholarly work in the evangelical tradition.

In his 1981 book, *Toward An Exegetical Theology*, Kaiser rightly points out the current crisis in preaching: on the one hand, there is a shift from the single meaning of the text to the multiple meanings of the interpreter; on the other hand, preachers often fail to move from the critical analysis of the biblical text to the practical presentation of a relevant message. He then proposes a syntactical-theological method to develop

sermons from the biblical texts. The method takes into account the contextual, syntactical (identifying the theme proposition and the connection of various parts of the text), and verbal analysis of the passage, very much in line with the grammatico-historical method of interpretation of the Reformation tradition. For theological analysis, Kaiser proposes the principle of “the analogy of antecedent Scripture” or “informing theology,” first introduced in page 90 with details given in chapter 6. Simply put, such a theological exegesis needs to be done diachronically; that is, one should avoid using the later teaching of the Bible to unpack the text under study.

Kaiser maintains the same methodology in his 2003 book *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament*, a more practical book for preachers. But he further suggests the promise plan of God as the unifying theme. In other words, he recommends establishing a biblical theology by the diachronic approach of studying the promise theme throughout the biblical history as the proper preparation of preaching the Old Testament. While Kaiser has been emphatic about the “forward reading” approach, there is still some element of backward reading in his sermon illustrations, for example the message from Leviticus 16:1-34 in the 2003 book, pp. 146-151.

In the same evangelical tradition, one can find a similar yet slightly different voice. In *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, Greidanus proposes a holistic

literary-historical-theological method of interpreting the Bible, against the naturalistic method (denial of the role of transcendence in history) as well as various contemporary atomistic approaches (source, form and redaction criticism, for example). Much of this holistic approach is similar to Kaiser's, but Greidanus emphasizes the unified redemptive history bridging the two Testaments. Therefore, he suggests that the Old Testament needs to be interpreted in the context of the whole Canon; that is, in light of later revelation in the New Testament.

Such a hermeneutical circle of reading the Scripture is apparent in the title of Greidanus' 1999 book *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*. In this book, Greidanus first provides a review and evaluation of the history of preaching Christ from the Old Testament from the apostolic fathers to modern interpreters. He then proposes various ways of developing Christocentric messages from the Old Testament, such as the redemptive-historical progression, promise-fulfillment, typology, analogy, longitudinal themes, New Testament references and contrast.<sup>64</sup>

Achtemeier, treating the entire Bible as one story, advocates the same idea as Greidanus in her book *Preaching from the Old Testament*. She insists the pairing of

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<sup>64</sup> Concerning Greidanus' approach, I agree that as Christians we need to pay attention to how a particular Old Testament passage may contribute to God's overall revelation of His redemptive work which is fully manifested in Jesus Christ. But I do not think that every Old Testament passage contributes equally to teaching about Jesus. Therefore, we should also be careful not to force a Christocentric interpretation out of every Old Testament passage. In other words, it may be appropriate to use certain Old Testament Scripture as an exemplary or moral teaching. New Testament writers did not use the Old Testament solely for teaching about Christ. For instance, James used the story of Elijah (1 Kings 17-18) simply as an example of a righteous man whose prayer had a powerful effect in James 5:17-18.

Old and New Testament texts in developing sermons based on the Old Testament. One can also find another agreeing voice in *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* by Goldsworthy. In this book, the author teaches how to apply biblical theology in expository preaching to develop Christ-centered sermons from all the Scriptures.

Another perspective actually includes elements of both approaches described above. In *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Fee and Stuart argue that the Old Testament narrative communicates its meaning on three levels, (Chapter 5, particularly pp. 79-81). The top level is God's overarching universal plan with the key aspects of the creation, the fall of humanity, and the redemption through the Messiah. The middle level is about Israel; starting from the call of Abraham; through the enslavement of Abraham's descendants in Egypt, followed by their deliverance from bondage by the Lord; the establishment of the Davidic kingdom in the Promised Land; Israel's persistent sin in spite of God's discipline; the eventual exile; and the final restoration. The bottom level contains hundreds of individual narratives that make up the middle and top levels. These narratives describe many people's struggle in life, often as lessons of virtue and vice. Fee and Stuart's three-level perspective suggests that there is legitimacy of studying the Old Testament story with Kaiser's forward reading approach; at the same time, it is important not to lose the overarching view of redemptive history

proposed by Greidanus.

The above literature research indicates that any individual narrative in the Old Testament can be studied all by itself. Yet, for the fullest sense, a story may also communicate its meanings when viewed within the larger contexts of the entire Bible. In this way, God's people today may still learn to apply the principles of holy living from the Old Testament narratives of the past, as well as the various aspects of redemptive history still unfolding under God's sovereignty.

### **Exegeting the Hebrew Narratives with the Literary/Rhetorical Analysis**

Narrative, being the dominant form in the Bible, has enjoyed much attention in the field of the literary/rhetorical analysis of the Bible. Alter's groundbreaking *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981) explores many techniques Hebrew writers used in telling stories. Alter points out that Hebrew narrative is so laconic that readers need to reshape their reading habits in order to capture the meanings of the biblical story. Hebrew writers often use the technique of repetition, particularly the repetition of single words (the thematic key-word), to enunciate and develop the meanings of the story. Alter also calls readers to pay attention to the reported actions in the story, particularly their recurrence, parallels, analogy and contrast. Using this technique, Hebrew writers subtly convey their evaluation of particular characters or events. Perhaps the most important thing to pay attention to is the dialogue in biblical stories. By devoting a large portion

of the narrative to dialogue between the characters, the narrator minimizes his intervention in telling the story. In other words, biblical writers like to lead the readers to inferences through oblique hints rather than explicit statement.

Many of Alter's points can be found in Berlin's *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (1983). For example, Berlin mentions the narrative analogy, very much the same as Alter's repetitive type-scene, as one way that the biblical writers invite readers to interpret one story in relationship to another. She also emphasizes the succinctness of Hebrew narratives so that readers need to fill in the picture when reading a biblical story. Berlin devotes much of her book to teach how to properly interpret the biblical writer's representation of the characters in the story which in turn will affect our understanding of the meanings of the story. The portraits of biblical characters are given through a number of techniques for characterization, such as description, inner life, speech, action, and contrast. Among these techniques, speech, action and contrast are probably the most frequently encountered. Again, through these techniques, the minimal representation by the narrator may actually yield the maximum use of imagination by the readers. Berlin uses the book of Ruth to illustrate many of the techniques she has described in reading biblical narrative.

In his 1989 book *Narrative Art in the Bible*, Bar-Efrat provides a detailed examination of the various literary aspects of biblical narrative. In the early chapters,



he discusses the role of the narrator as well as the shaping of characters, similar to what Alter and Berlin have emphasized. He then devotes two chapters to discuss the rhetorical effects of the story's plot (chapter 3), as well as time and space (chapter 4). The plot is the narrative's body. With the skillful shaping of the units and stages of the plot, the biblical writer not only arouses readers' interest and emotional involvement, but also imbues the events with meaning. Furthermore, all the movements and activities took place in time and space, the story's setting. Again, the shaping of time and space helps the readers to experience the dynamics of the story and thus to absorb its teachings. Bar-Efrat concludes with an analysis on the story of Amnon and Tamar.

Another literary scholar, J. P. Fokkeman, begins by introducing two components in the art of reading, language and time, in *Reading Biblical Narrative* (originally published in 1995, with the English version in 1999). He then uses twelve Old Testament stories as examples to show how various techniques used by the biblical writer can draw readers into the story's world. Paying attention to these techniques can help uncover the rich meanings of the biblical stories. Fokkeman's emphasis in this book is consistent with the work of Alter, Berlin and Bar-Efrat.

Evangelical scholars have also produced work that adopts the literary/rhetorical approach of interpreting the Bible in general which include discussions focusing on biblical narratives. One can find practical suggestions distilled from the specialized

work mentioned above. For example, Ryken's *How to Read the Bible as Literature* teaches the readers how to pay attention to the literary artistry and craftsmanship of the biblical authors. He devotes two chapters to deal with the stories of the Bible. In chapter 2, Ryken points out the importance of three basic ingredients of every story: setting, character and plot. In chapter 3, he discusses the various types of stories found in the Bible, such as heroic, epic, comedy and tragedy. His later book *Words of Delight* (1992) presents similar concepts, but with more expanded and detailed discussions, about how Bible stories work in communicating meanings.

Pratt, an Evangelical Old Testament scholar, sets forth a three-step process of interpreting Old Testament narratives in *He Gave Us Stories*. The major portion of this book is about the second step, investigating. In this section, Pratt guides the readers through the features of Old Testament narratives, including character, scene depiction and structure analysis in individual episodes, consistent with Ryken's emphasis of the three basic ingredients of every story.

In *Preaching with Variety*, Arthurs challenges the preachers to recreate the dynamics of various biblical genres. In chapter 4, he deals with the issue of exegeting narrative. In particular, Arthurs points out the rhetorical functions of the important features of every story. The plot functions by highlighting ideas, inducing suspense, and fulfilling expectations. The primary rhetorical function of character is

identification, or evoking responses, by the readers. The story's setting serves to ignite imagination as well as prompt association. Paying attention to the rhetorical functions is essential for a preacher to re-experience the story in exegesis and sermon preparation.

The above scholarly work has demonstrated the place of literary/rhetorical analysis in studying biblical narratives. Biblical writers have used much literary artistry to craft their story telling. Learning to be sensitive to the story's features is essential in discovering the meanings that the biblical writers intend to communicate through telling the story.

### **Preparing Sermons from Biblical Narratives**

In the field of homiletics, scholars and preachers have also begun paying attention to developing various sermon forms other than the traditional propositional sermon, including a growing interest in the place of narrative in the pulpit ministry. Craddock's book *As One without Authority* sparked this trend. In this book, Craddock suggests that the preacher lead the congregation to experience the dynamics of the text, rather than preaching to the congregation in an authoritative stance. He argues for inductive sermon form over deductive, as induction naturally engages the listeners to arrive at the conclusion themselves. Lewis and Lewis also emphasize the place of stories as well as induction in preaching. In *Learning to Preach Like Jesus*, they first argue that the

people-centered style to be the reason why Jesus' preaching was so effective. They then point out that Jesus' people-centered preaching methods include the use of stories, parables, dialogues and questions. All these techniques appeal to common experiences. Lewis and Lewis also show from the contemporary research that people learn more from experiencing than abstract ideas.

To capture the effect of story, Lowry calls preachers to pay attention to the most important feature of every story, its underlining thread or plot line, in *How to Preach a Parable*. The plot line includes the sequence of the opening conflict, escalation, reversal and the final closure. He proposes four different ways to design a narrative sermon: running, delaying, suspending and alternating the story, in order to keep the listeners interested. In a later book, *The Homiletical Plot*, Lowry even suggests that every sermon, being an event-in-time, should capture the rhetorical power of narrative by taking on the form as a narrative art. To shape the sermon like a plot, Lowry proposes the movement of five stages: upsetting the equilibrium; analyzing the discrepancy; disclosing the clue to resolution; experiencing the gospel; anticipating the consequences.

Graves, like Lowry, viewing preaching also as an event-in-time, uses music as an analogy to sermon to describe ways to prepare form-sensitive messages in *The Sermon as Symphony*. He calls preachers to be sensitive to three important issues: the mood

and movement of the text in the exegesis process; how can the sermon say and do the same as the text; and the target audience. In *Preaching and the Literary Form of the Bible*, Long also argues that preachers need to take into account the literary characteristics in sermon preparation. In other words, different biblical genres should not be straitjacketed into a fixed sermon form all the time. In the chapter on preaching narratives, he discusses the rhetorical functions of this particular genre, including identification with the story's characters, and the demand of response from the audience to a claim about life as taught in the story.

All the works mentioned above tend to encourage preachers to develop sermons from biblical stories in inductive style. In contrast, one may find helpful suggestions in Larsen's *Telling the Old, Old Story* in developing deductive, propositional sermons while taking advantage of the dynamics of biblical stories. Larsen insists that faithful preaching of biblical stories still needs to begin with the conceptualization of content. But preachers need to also pay attention to emotion, conviction and unction. In *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, Mathewson combines the fruits of literary approach in interpreting Old Testament narratives, with the development of expository messages in Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*. Simply put, preachers still need to discover the "big idea," the didactic or propositional truth, of the biblical story under study. In terms of shaping the sermon, he advocates a variety of approaches: deductive,

inductive or even a combination. In this book, Mathewson presents a methodology of moving from the Old Testament story to contemporary message. Another excellent book is Arthurs' *Preaching with Variety*. In chapter 5, Arthurs gives many practical suggestions of how to prepare narrative sermons, such as: induction, maintain the sermon's movement like a plot, try a third-person sermon, try a first-person sermon, show the story by using vivid language, and use personal testimony.

In designing a sermon form from biblical narratives, preachers can exercise great flexibility. However, they ought to aim to help the congregation re-experience the story to take full advantage of the power of biblical narratives.

## **Conclusion**

The above literature review shows the rich resources for preparing preachers for the proper preaching of the Old Testament stories in the Christian church today. Many insights gained from the literature research here will be incorporated in the teaching materials developed for this project.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Project Design**

As stated in chapter 1, the project's thesis is: The neglect and mishandling of Old Testament narratives in Chinese churches can be improved by training the Chinese pastors to apply rhetorical analysis to the biblical text in sermon preparation. Accordingly, the project involves two main components: the design of a training course incorporating the insights gained from the literature research in chapter 3, and a field test of the training course for evaluation.

In planning for the field test, however, I found it necessary to make some adjustments. The teaching arrangement was to conduct a four-day training with a group of preachers in China. Based on my previous experiences interacting with the pastors and church leaders in China, I decided that it was important to give a basic introduction on homiletic principles first. Furthermore, the size of the class was too big to allow the trainees to actually practice preaching during the training session. Therefore, the final field test did not include individual preaching by the students, but substituted with group exercises.

To describe the training course and the field test of this project in more details, I will discuss how I designed the teaching materials, the assignments and the student evaluation form, as well as the trainees who attended the training session.

## **Design of the Teaching Materials**

The main purpose of the training course was to train preachers to apply literary/rhetorical analysis in preparing sermons from the Old Testament narrative materials. Two major constraints, the education level of the trainees and the training schedule, affected the final design of the teaching materials.

In the past fifteen years, I have been involved in teaching/training pastors of house church systems in China on a regular basis. The independent house church movement in China was rooted in the rural regions or the peasant lands.<sup>65</sup> The majority of church leaders, pastors and preachers do not have advanced education. In fact, most of them have secondary education or below. Therefore, I needed to adapt the rich literature resources (mentioned in chapter 3), which are written in English with the target readers in college or post-graduate levels, to fit the trainees with secondary education in rural China.

The second factor affecting the design of the teaching materials was the training schedule. The typical arrangement of training in China is conducted in week long blocks so that a lecturer must give his/her lectures within one week. As a result, we must cover the various subjects quite quickly.

Due to the above two factors, it was crucial that the teaching materials be concise

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<sup>65</sup> See Jonathan Chao, *The China Mission Handbook* (Hong Kong: Chinese Church Research Center, 1989), for the house church movement in China, particularly pp. 44-47.



and simple. For example, in the basic introduction on homiletic principles, I wanted to emphasize the importance of developing a central idea and the relevant application from the text under study. To accomplish this, I started with the definition of expository preaching given by Haddon Robinson, with some illustrations. Following the definition, I moved quickly to the “how to,” adopting the simple but practical suggestion of narrowing a passage’s subject by testing the subject with a series of developmental questions.<sup>66</sup> I then gave an illustration, with time allotted for the trainees to do individual exercises.<sup>67</sup>

The final design of the teaching materials included the following parts: Introduction to expository preaching; The importance of preaching Old Testament narratives; Interpreting Biblical narratives; Preaching Biblical narratives; and An illustrative sermon. The teaching notes, a total of thirty slides translated from Chinese to English, are given in Appendix B.

### **Assignments**

The assignments focused on exegeting Old Testament narratives, particularly paying attention to the literary/rhetorical analysis of the text. Due to the size of the class and the time constraint, it was impossible to ask each student to practice

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<sup>66</sup> Robinson, 66-67.

<sup>67</sup> See Slides 1 to 8 for the section of Introduction to Expository Preaching in Appendix B. With this approach, the sermon will most likely take a semi-inductive form, that is, the main points of the sermon are complements of the subject of the exegetical idea of the sermon. See Robinson, 124-126; also his definition of “subject completed” in p. 136.

preaching on the Old Testament stories.

One month prior to the teaching session, I assigned eight passages, all Old Testament stories, as the pre-training exercise.<sup>68</sup> The students were divided into eight groups, with one passage assigned to each group. Each student was to study his/her assigned passage individually and to hand in a sermon outline on the first day of the class.

During the four-day training session, the students were given several opportunities for group exercise and discussion. The group exercise/discussion was to encourage the students to incorporate the lessons learned in the lecture time, such as how to identify the story's plot, how to discern the art of characterization, and how to exegete the story's setting. Finally, each group was to submit a sermon outline based on the joint effort of the group on the last day of the class.

The pre-training exercise and the sermon from the group discussion during the training were designed to form part of the final evaluation of this project. While there was no individual preaching by the students, I could still evaluate the effectiveness of this training course by examining the sermon outlines submitted from the groups based on several categories: clarity of exegetical idea, relevancy of application, and genre

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<sup>68</sup> The eight passages are: Genesis 22:1-19; Joshua 3:1-4:24; Joshua 9:1-27; Ruth; 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11; 1 Samuel 3:1-21; 1 Samuel 25:1-42; Daniel 1:1-21.

sensitivity.<sup>69</sup> The comparison between the final group sermons with the pre-training ones may indicate whether any positive changes corresponding to the main emphases of my teaching have taken place as the result of the training course.

In addition to the above assignments, I also designed questions, examples and illustrations during the lecture time to engage the students, even though the size of the class made such an approach more difficult.

### **Student Evaluation Form**

An evaluation form was designed for the students to provide feedback as another source of the final evaluation of the project. The evaluation form contains two parts.

The first part allows the students to reflect whether this training will have an impact on their preaching of the Old Testament narratives in the future, by asking three questions:

whether the students will increase the frequency of using Old Testament stories in preaching; whether the students will change the way of preparing sermons from the Old Testament stories; a further explanation of the answers to the first two questions.

The second part lets the students evaluate the training course, by the rating of excellent, average or poor, according to five categories: Course content; Teacher's presentation;

Illustration and examples; Group discussions; Assignments. The evaluation form (translated from Chinese to English) is given in Appendix C.

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<sup>69</sup> See pp. 47-49 of chapter 5 for details.

## **The Trainees**

The participants who attended the training session were pastors, preachers, and Bible class teachers of a house church system in southern China. This house church system has developed into about 130,000 members, with over 400 full-time preachers. Our church has arranged to provide them with a three-year training program. Each year, we will conduct three to four training sessions, beginning in 2006.

The initial arrangement for this training session was to have about seventy full-time preachers. But, three weeks before the training session, they decided to add a group of twenty-nine younger teachers, as well as some coworkers just auditing for this class. The final count showed about one hundred and twenty attended the training.

The training participants exhibited a diverse background. Of the seventy-eight who filled out the evaluation form at the end of the training session, forty were male and thirty-eight female. The ages ranged from 19 to 52 years old, with an average of 31. Their education ranged from elementary graduate to college level. In terms of preaching experiences, they ranged from beginner (one year or less) to experienced (having preached for twenty-five years). Table 2 (Appendix D) lists the more detailed personal data of these seventy-eight students.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> I suspect that only the seventy or so students in the originally planned class handed in the evaluation forms. This still accounted for 65% of the total students, thus a reasonably good representation of the class.

## **Summary**

I designed a homiletics training course for the purpose of training Chinese pastors to preach Old Testament narratives. Special emphasis was given to help the pastors apply literary/rhetorical analysis in sermon preparation of Old Testament narratives, even though the teaching materials included a basic introduction on homiletic principles based on the needs of the audience. As a field test, I taught a diverse group of preachers in southern China from October 31 to November 3, 2006 using the teaching materials designed, and collected their feedback. The next chapter presents the evaluation and outcome of this project.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Outcomes**

Having field-tested the teaching materials to train Chinese pastors to apply literary/rhetorical analysis in preparing sermons from Old Testament stories, I now turn to the final evaluations. The first part of evaluation is based on comparing the sermon outlines submitted in the beginning of the teaching session with the sermon outlines submitted from the group discussion during the training. The second part summarizes the feedback from the student evaluation forms gathered.

Finally, I present the conclusions learned from this project as well as future recommendations.

#### **Evaluation of Sermon Outlines**

To compare the pre-training individual sermons with the sermons submitted from the group discussion, I examined the sermon outlines according to three categories: exegetical idea, relevant application, and genre sensitivity. I chose these categories because a clear exegetical idea and relevant application were the important emphasis in the introduction to expository preaching in the teaching materials, and genre sensitivity would reflect the literary/rhetorical analysis in preparing sermons from biblical narratives.

For the first category, I considered the following marks of a good exegetical idea:

(1) Each main point of the sermon outline is a complete statement (or sentence);<sup>71</sup> (2)

Each main point expresses an idea (or a sub-idea) which further supports the central idea of the sermon;<sup>72</sup> (3) The exegetical idea of the sermon accurately reflects the text on the one hand by including all the major concerns of the text, and on the other hand by not including main point (or idea) from outside of the text.

To measure relevancy, I adopted Kaiser's suggestions to: (1) Use first person pronouns in the main points; (2) Avoid all use of proper names in the outline except for any of God's names; (3) Avoid using third-personal pronouns.<sup>73</sup> These criteria are over-simplified, since a sermon's relevancy involves other factors such as the use of real life illustrations, current events and self disclosures. But these three marks may be the only one detectable by examining sermon outlines to determine a sermon's contemporary relevancy.

For the third category, genre sensitivity, I looked for the following marks: (1) The sermon's movement follows the development of the story's plot line, perhaps in an

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<sup>71</sup> Since I taught the students to articulate the exegetical idea with the "subject completed" approach (chapter 4, p. 42), my evaluation of their sermons for exegetical idea was based on examining their sermon outlines. I considered this criterion first because an idea must be expressed as a complete sentence (subject, verb and predicate). As will be shown later, many pre-training sermon outlines do not even meet this simple criterion.

<sup>72</sup> Robinson suggests that an idea contains two essential elements, a subject and a complement. The subject of an idea describes "What am I talking about?" and the complement further completes the idea by answering the question "What am I saying about what I am talking about?" See Robinson, 41-43.

<sup>73</sup> Kaiser, 57-58. To make the main points relevant and contemporary, Kaiser also emphasizes the use of imperative or present-tense verbs instead of past-tense. But, the Chinese language does not have a clear distinction between the present tense and past tense of verbs.

inductive arrangement; (2) The sermon “shows” the story with its events, characters, and setting; (3) The sermon outline helps the audience to re-experience the story by prompting suspense, identification, and imagination.<sup>74</sup>

I collected a total of sixty-two individual sermons, and I tabulated the outlines (translated from Chinese to English) in Tables 3 to 10 (corresponding to Groups I to VIII) in Appendix E.

Of the sixty-two outlines, only two of them show a good exegetical idea. I observed several problems. First of all, many sermons are formulated in a way that each main point is not a complete statement or sentence, but only a partial phrase or clause. Take the sermon outline by Student I-3, based on Genesis 22:1-19 in Table 3 as an example: 1. The testing from God; 2. The action of faith; 3. The substitute of a lamb; 4. The promise of blessing. In this sermon outline each point is only a heading. Or, put another way, each point only deals with the subject of an idea without the complement to complete the idea. A total of fourteen sermons are assembled in such manner.

Another problem common to the pre-training sermon outlines is that the main points are merely the historicized narration or summary of the sub-sections of the story. For example, consider the sermon outline by Student V-7, based on 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11 in Table 7: 1. Hannah was provoked; 2. Hannah prayed before God; 3. Hannah was

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<sup>74</sup> The sermon movement may be the only one detectable from examining the sermon outlines, as the second and the third markers are usually imbedded in the detailed presentation of a sermon.



remembered by God; 4. Hannah gave thanks to God. These points describe what happened according to the text, but do not convey the idea or concept intended by the text. Thirty of the sixty-two sermons fall in this category.

I also identified ten sermons which are the hybrid of the above two. In other words, the outline contains points as a mixture of some complete sentences and headings, such as the sermon of Student I-6 in Table 3. All together, eighty-seven percent of the individual sermons (fifty-four out of sixty-two) fail to exhibit the first two marks of a good exegetical idea as mentioned in page 48.

This leaves only eight of the sixty-two individual sermons with outlines which convey complete ideas.<sup>75</sup> Yet, these sermons do not necessarily present the accurate exegetical idea. For example, consider the sermon by Student III-7 on Joshua 9:1-27 in Table 5: 1. Believers should be alert as the enemy will resort to lies; 2. Believers should be alert as the enemy's scheme will succeed; 3. Believers should be alert otherwise they will enslave the enemy. Clearly, the intention is to build the sermon around the idea that believers should be alert. But, the first two points actually overlap somewhat. Furthermore, main point number 3, drawing from the text that the Gibeonites ended up serving as woodcutters and water carriers, does not make sense. Why would enslaving the enemy be a motivation or reason for the believers to be alert?

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<sup>75</sup> See sermons of Students I-5, II-1, III-7, V-5, VI-7, VII-8, VIII-2 and VIII-6.

Besides, the immediate context with chapter 10 describing Joshua's success in overcoming the five southern kings at Gibeon would suggest that the treaty with the Gibeonites, even though a result of the Gibeonites' deception, was still under the Lord's mysterious providence.<sup>76</sup>

Overall, two (students V-5 and VIII-6) out of sixty-two sermons are marginally acceptable when measured against the three marks for a good exegetical idea.

For the category of relevancy, I looked for the usage of first person pronouns, as well as the avoidance of proper names (except God's names) and third person pronouns in the outlines. Of sixty-two sermons, only four meet these simple criteria.<sup>77</sup>

To evaluate the individual pre-training sermons for genre sensitivity, I only focused on the eight sermons mentioned in the footnote of page 50 since the other fifty-four do not even exhibit a clear thought. I found that these eight sermons do not show enough sensitivity to the narrative genre. Perhaps four sermons have shown some indication that the sermon movement follows the story's plot line.<sup>78</sup> Yet, I observed that five of the eight sermons carry the commanding tone: We *should* walk the path of obedience (Student II-1); Believers *should* be alert (Student III-7); We *should* take

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<sup>76</sup> I use this sermon to show the need for more careful exegesis. I can list other examples. The sermon by Student VI-7 (on 1 Samuel 3) is another good illustration. The first main point is: We should take heed not to follow Eli's footsteps. Eli's failure to restrain his two sons is indeed an important background as described in 1 Samuel 2: 12-36, but this is hardly the emphasis of chapter 3.

<sup>77</sup> See sermons of Students II-1, VII-8, VIII-2 and VIII-6.

<sup>78</sup> See Sermons of Students I-5, III-7, V-5 and VIII-6.

heed not to follow Eli's footstep (Student VI-7); *Be* steadfast in faith (Student VIII-2); Believers *should* be faithful (Student VIII-6). But the form of a story is more descriptive than prescriptive. Consequently, a narrative sermon should "show" the story with its events, characters, and setting. Furthermore, one unique feature of narrative materials is that it communicates meanings subtly rather than explicitly. So, while there is indeed a moral lesson to be learned from biblical stories, it is often more suitable to communicate the moral lesson by implication than with imperatives. In other words, sermons based on biblical narratives should aim to help the audience to re-experience the story. Therefore, I considered that only two sermons (by Students I-5 and V-5) are marginally acceptable when measured by their genre sensitivity.

In contrast to the mostly unclear, inaccurate and lack of sensitivity to the narrative genre outlines, the sermons submitted from the group discussion showed noticeable improvement. The sermon outlines submitted by the eight groups are listed in Table 11 in Appendix E.

There is obvious improvement in these eight sermon outlines in the category of exegetical idea. First of all, the problems of lack of clarity (incomplete statements or mere historicized summary) were basically corrected. Only one sermon, Group IV on the book of Ruth, still has the main points in the form of headings. Furthermore, after examining the outlines, I considered that four sermons are close to the target in terms

of the exegetical idea accurately reflecting the text.<sup>79</sup> For example, consider the sermon by Group I on Genesis 22:1-19: 1. Sometimes God tests us because testing may reveal the reality of our obedience and faith; 2. Sometimes God tests us because testing may lead to our experiencing that God will provide; 3. Sometimes God tests us because testing may further result in God's affirming his blessing on us. These main points cover all the major concerns in the text: the announcement of God's testing of Abraham (v. 1-2), Abraham's obedience and faith in the Lord (v. 3-8), the provision of a ram in the last moment (v. 9-14), and the announcement of blessing (v. 15-19). Also, the interrogative question of "why" was used to relate the various parts together to bring out the positive reason (or purpose) dealing with the subject of testing.

For the category of relevant application, seven of the eight group sermons meet the criteria of using first person pronouns and avoiding third person pronouns in the outlines.

I also observed improvement in genre sensitivity in some of the eight group sermons. The sermon outlines submitted by Groups I, III, VI and VIII exhibit the movement following the development of the story's plot line. Furthermore, these sermon outlines have the potential to "show" the story's events, characters; and to help the audience re-experience the story. For example, in the sermon by Group I, the three

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<sup>79</sup> Sermons of Groups I, III, VI and VIII in Table 11.

main points move from the initial conflict caused by God's testing (requiring our obedience and faith), through the resolution (God will provide) to the final blessing. Because the groups submitted only skeletal outlines, I can not be certain that the full sermons would "show" the truth, but the potential is there. Another example is the sermon by Group III on Joshua 9: 1. We may never avoid unintentional mistakes since there is much deception in this world; 2. We are to remain faithful even in our mistakes, since we should be concerned with our God's honor; 3. We can trust God that he can still bring forth grace even out of our mistakes. These three main points clearly follow the development of the story's plot line. They also have the potential to help the audience re-experience the story, by evoking the sense of suspense in facing deception, and by identifying with the story character's emotions. Another evidence of improvement in genre sensitivity is that only two of the eight sermons are in the imperative mood. This suggests that the students have learned that the form of a story is more descriptive than prescriptive.

In summary, the comparison of individual sermons prepared before the training session with the sermons submitted from the group discussion does show noticeable improvements from this training course. For exegetical idea, two of sixty-two individual sermons (3%) were marginally acceptable, and four of the eight group sermons (50%) were acceptable. To make the main points relevant and contemporary,

the students learned to construct the sermon outlines using first person pronouns instead of third person pronouns. The improvement went from four of sixty-two (6%) to seven of eight (90%). Finally, the students also learned to pay attention to the narrative genre when preparing sermons from biblical stories. Two of sixty-two individual sermons (3%) were considered marginally acceptable when measured by their genre sensitivity. Four of the eight group sermons (50%) showed improvement in developing sermon movement according to the story's plot line, showing the story with its events, characters, and in helping the audience to re-experience the story.<sup>80</sup>

### **Summary of Student Feedback**

Besides evaluating outlines, I used a second device to measure the effectiveness of my teaching. This second device was the student evaluation form which contains two parts. The first part allows the students to reflect whether this training course will have an impact on their preaching in the future. They were asked to answer two questions: whether they will increase the frequency of using Old Testament narratives in their preaching and whether they will change the way they prepare sermons from the Old Testament stories. The students were also asked to further explain their answers to these questions.

Of the seventy-eight students who filled out the evaluation form, all of them

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<sup>80</sup> Due to the large size of the class, comparing the group sermons with the individual ones seemed to be the only feasible thing to do. I also need to point out that, due to the time constraint, it was difficult for the students to have sufficient exercises in practicing the lessons learned from the teaching session.

answered “Yes” to the first two questions. Sixty of them gave their further explanations. Out of these sixty, forty-four (75%) indicated that the literary/rhetorical analysis on the narrative genre has helped them to see the potential of preaching Old Testament stories in a much more interesting, effective, and dynamic way than before. According to the above feedback, the training course was effective in helping these students to preach the Old Testament stories more frequently and more effectively in the future.

The second part of the evaluation form let the students evaluate the training course according to five categories: Course content; Teacher’s presentation; Illustrations and examples; Group discussions; Assignments. Students were asked to evaluate each category by the rating of excellent, average or poor. Students were also asked to provide suggestions for improvement for the category they considered poor. The detail results are given in Table 12, Appendix F.

For the first three categories, the students’ feedback was very consistent: eighty-six percent (86%) of them rated these categories excellent, thirteen percent (13%) average, and about one percent (1%) poor.<sup>81</sup> For the category of group discussions, the students’ feedback was significantly different: only thirty-seven students (48%) gave the excellent rating, twenty-nine students (37%) average, and

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<sup>81</sup> One student suggested that the course content should have more illustrations. One student wished that I would give the teachings in a slower pace.

twelve (15%) poor.<sup>82</sup> Considering that the class size was one hundred and twenty students with about fifteen students per group during the discussion time, it was not surprising that the approval rate for this category was much lower. For the fifth category (assignments), fifty-five students (70%) rated excellent, twenty students (26%) average and three students (4%) poor.<sup>83</sup>

The ratings given by the students on the five categories indicate that the receptivity of the training session was reasonably good. Two areas need improvement, the design of the group discussions and the assignments, which require a smaller class size as well as a longer training schedule.

In summary, the students' feedback based on the evaluation forms collected indicate that the training course conducted to teach Chinese pastors to apply literary/rhetorical analysis in preparing sermons on Old Testament narratives was reasonably effective and well received.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The field test and the subsequent evaluation have validated this project's thesis that training the Chinese pastors to apply rhetorical analysis to the biblical text in sermon preparation can improve the neglect and mishandling of the Old Testament

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<sup>82</sup> Nine out of the twelve students who rated this category poor gave their suggestions for improvement: five suggested that I should spend more time with each group during their discussions; two would like to replace the group discussion with more lecture time; one considered the group discussion time too little; and one suggested that the group size should be smaller.

<sup>83</sup> Two students recommended that I should give more assignments.



narratives in the Chinese churches. In addition, I have learned much through this experience.

I discovered that there is a much broader need to train the Chinese pastors to preach. While I provided a basic introduction on homiletic principles, the field test revealed that many Chinese pastors urgently needed more attention given to fundamental homiletic training. Their individual pre-training sermon outlines showed that they needed basic teaching in how to formulate a clear exegetical idea from the text.

To improve the effectiveness of training, therefore, I would suggest dividing the teaching into two separate courses, four to five days for each course. The first course will simply cover the fundamentals dealing with identifying the exegetical idea, formulating sermon outlines, and making the sermon relevant and contemporary. The second course will then build on the first one, providing training of how to preach biblical narratives.

I also learned from the student feedback that the design of the group discussions in the training course needed much improvement. The negative feedback indicated that homiletic training should be conducted with a limited size of class, perhaps no more than thirty students.

Positively, the training course was reasonably effective and well received, based

on the evaluation of the group sermons submitted during the training and the student feedback. I believe the curriculum designed in this project can be used for teaching Chinese pastors to preach the Old Testament narratives. Some improvements or refinements are needed, such as adding more illustrations, personal exercises, and further dividing the teaching into two courses as mentioned above.

This project grew out of my conviction that Old Testament narrative is part of God's precious and inspired word to his people. Yet, ever since my conversion almost thirty years ago, I have found little usage of the Old Testament narrative in the pulpit ministry in the Chinese churches. Furthermore, when an Old Testament story is used to develop a sermon, the message usually comes across as a dry, boring historical lesson. Indeed, it is hard to interpret and apply the Old Testament narratives in church today. But literary/rhetorical analysis can help bridge the gap. I believe that this project has laid a foundation as part of the solution for training the Chinese pastors in preparing sermons from the Old Testament narratives. This study should also encourage Chinese pastors/preachers to apply literary/rhetorical analysis to other biblical genres in sermon preparation, so that the word of God, so rich and diverse in nature, can be communicated to God's people effectively today.

## Appendix A

**Table 1: Sermon Outlines on Nine Old Testament Stories Sampled from Four Chinese Churches in North America**

Sermon	Bible Text	Sermon Outline
1	1 Samuel 1:10-2:10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hannah was an unhappy woman in a relatively happy environment.</li> <li>2. Hannah pleaded with the Lord, with persistence and faith.</li> <li>3. Hannah honored her promise before the Lord.</li> <li>4. Hannah praised God for His sovereignty.</li> </ol>
2	1 Samuel 4:3-4, 21-22; 7:1-14	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How could the Lord's Ark ever fail?</li> <li>2. How could Ichabod turn into Ebenezer?</li> </ol>
3	Exodus 3:1-15	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Moses knew God more after encountering God.</li> <li>2. Moses knew himself more after encountering God.</li> <li>3. Moses knew God's will after encountering God.</li> </ol>
4	Genesis 22:1-19	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Abraham was asked to offer his only son.</li> <li>2. Abraham responded with obedience and faith.</li> <li>3. Abraham received God's blessing again.</li> </ol>
5	Leviticus 10:1-11	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The basic requirement for man to come before God is to obey God's word.</li> <li>2. God grants grace even man fails to obey him.</li> <li>3. God teaches man to choose to obey His way.</li> </ol>
6	Numbers 22-24	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Balak asked Balaam to curse the Israelites.</li> <li>2. Balaam ignored the Lord's warning.</li> <li>3. Balaam was spared because of his donkey.</li> <li>4. Balaam blessed the Israelites at the end.</li> </ol>
7	Genesis 13:1-18	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There are four reasons to handle success properly.</li> <li>2. There are three principles to handle success.</li> </ol>
8	Ruth 1:16-18	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Elimelech and Naomi made a wrong choice in life.</li> <li>2. Ruth had chosen wisely and correctly.</li> <li>3. Ruth's life had the leading of God.</li> </ol>
9	Judges 6:1-28	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. God called Gideon to be a deliverer.</li> <li>2. Gideon tore down idols to renew true worship.</li> <li>3. Gideon asked for signs.</li> <li>4. God provided Gideon with the victory.</li> </ol>

## Appendix B

### Slide 1

#### Introduction to Expository Preaching

A definition –

Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.

Haddon Robinson (*Biblical Preaching*, 21)

### Slide 2

#### Introduction to Expository Preaching

“ . . . the communication of a biblical concept derived from a passage in its context . . . ”

- The passage governs the sermon
- The preacher communicates a concept

(*Biblical Preaching*, 21-23)

Note: The following three slides further unpack the definition. I will also lead discussion about the difference (and pro/con) between topical preaching and expository preaching.

### Slide 3

## Introduction to Expository Preaching

“ . . . a biblical concept transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context. . . ”

- The concept comes from the text

*(Biblical Preaching, 24-25)*

*Exercise: Joshua 12*

Note: As an exercise, I will ask the students to answer the following questions: How many sub-divisions in this chapter? Any obvious difference of literary style? What is the historical context of this chapter?

### Slide 4

## Introduction to Expository Preaching

“ . . . a biblical concept which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.”

- The concept is applied to the preacher and the hearers

*(Biblical Preaching, 25-30)*

*Example: How would the lesson in Ruth be applied, if the emphasis is on her virtue as a daughter-in-law?*

Note: I have heard from many Chinese sermons that the main emphasis is on Ruth's virtue as a daughter-in-law. If so, how is this lesson applied to a male preacher, male believers? I will also use Ruth in the illustrative sermon in the last section.

## Slide 5

### Introduction to Expository Preaching

How to discover the central concept of a passage?

1. Select a passage with a complete unit of thought.
2. Analyze the details of the passage, outlining each part.
3. Relate the parts to each other by asking one of the six definitive questions: why, how, what, who, when and where.

*(Biblical Preaching, 53-70)*

## Slide 6

### Introduction to Expository Preaching

#### *Example: Matthew 18:21-35*

18:21-22 Jesus answered Peter's question and raised the number of times to forgive.

18:23-34 Jesus gave a parable:

v. 23-27 A king forgave a servant's huge amount of debt.

v. 28-34 The king put the same servant in prison as a result of the servant's refusal to forgive his fellow servant's debt.

18:35 Jesus concluded with a warning for those who do not forgive his brother.

Which of the six questions (6W) can relate the parts?

Slide 7

## Introduction to Expository Preaching

### *Example: Matthew 18:21-35*

Why should Jesus' disciples forgive their brother?

1. Because forgiving others is essential in human relationship.
2. Because forgiving others is expected from those who have received much forgiveness.
3. Because not forgiving others will result in severe consequences.

Slide 8

## Introduction to Expository Preaching

### A Practical Suggestion to Make the Sermon Outlines Relevant and Contemporary

Use 1<sup>st</sup> (or 2<sup>nd</sup> if appropriate) personal pronouns in the main points.

*Example:* Why should we (Christians) forgive others?

1. Because forgiving others is essential in our relationship with others.
2. Because forgiving others is expected from us who have received much forgiveness in Jesus Christ.
3. Because not-forgiving others will result in severe consequences in our life.

Slide 9

## The Importance of Preaching OT Narratives

### Three Basic Reasons:

1. The value of preaching the OT in general
2. The value of preaching OT narratives in particular
3. The value of using story to teach and to influence the audience due to the story's unique features

Slide 10

## The Importance of Preaching OT Narratives

### 1. The Value of Preaching the OT

- A. The Old Testament is the major portion of the Bible

*Question: In your experience, what is the portion of sermons based solely on the OT?*

Note: After gathering some feedback on this question, I will share with the class the findings of my research from various Chinese churches as mentioned in chapter 1.



**Slide 11**

## **The Importance of Preaching OT Narratives**

### **1. The Value of Preaching the OT (cont'd)**

#### **B. The OT provides the foundational knowledge about Jesus Christ**

##### **(1) Jesus' testimony**

John 5:39-47

Luke 24:25-27; 44-45

##### **(2) The Apostles' testimony**

1 Corinthians 15:3-5

2 Timothy 3:14-15

**Slide 12**

## **The Importance of Preaching OT Narratives**

### **1. The Value of Preaching the OT (cont'd)**

#### **C. The OT provides the foundational knowledge about Christian living**

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Slide 13

## The Importance of Preaching OT Narratives

### 2. The Value of Preaching OT Narratives

#### A. Narrative is the dominant genre in the OT

“It is our presupposition that the Holy Spirit knew what he was doing when he inspired so much of the Bible in the form of narrative. We think it is obvious that this type of literature serves God’s revelatory purpose well.”

*Fee and Stuart (How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, 78)*

*Question:* What are some major difficulties in preaching OT stories?

Slide 14

## The Importance of Preaching OT Narratives

### 2. The Value of Preaching OT Narratives

#### B. OT narratives can teach about knowing Jesus

(1) Jesus’ use of OT stories to show who he is

Matthew 12:1-8

Matthew 12:38-42

(2) Early disciples’ use of OT stories in evangelism

Acts 7

Acts 13:13-41

(3) The use of OT stories in the Apostles’ writing to teach about the gospel truth

Romans 9:6-18

Galatians 4:21-31

**Slide 15**

## The Importance of Preaching OT Narratives

### 2. The Value of Preaching OT Narratives

#### C. OT narratives can teach about Christian living

(1) Jesus' use of OT stories to teach about ethic (marriage)

Matthew 19:1-12

(2) The use of OT stories in the Apostles' writing to teach about Christian living

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

1 Timothy 2: 11-15

James 2:14-26

2 Peter 2

1 Corinthians 10:6-11

**Slide 16**

## The Importance of Preaching OT Narratives

### 3. The Value of Using Story to Teach and Influence the Audience

#### A. Story (or narrative) is a universal genre

(1) Stories have a universal appeal in every culture and every stage of our life.

(2) Every communicator knows the effect of story.

Slide 17

## The Importance of Preaching OT Narratives

### 3. The Value of Using Story to Teach and Influence the Audience

#### B. Rhetorical functions of story's 3 basic elements

<u>Plot</u>	Inducing suspense, fulfilling expectations, highlighting (showing) ideas
<u>Character</u>	Identification, evoking responses
<u>Setting</u>	Igniting imagination, prompting association

Jeffrey Arthurs (*Preaching with Variety*, chapter 4)

Note: I will give many examples from some familiar Chinese stories to demonstrate the rhetorical functions of story's three basic elements.

Slide 18

## The Importance of Preaching OT Narratives

### 3. The Value of Using Story to Teach and Influence the Audience

#### C. Biblical characters' using of story to teach and influence the audience

##### (1) Jesus' examples

Luke 10:29-37

Luke 15:1-32

##### (2) Other biblical characters

2 Samuel 12:1-4

2 Samuel 14: 1-24

## Slide 19

### Interpreting Biblical Narratives

#### 1. Choose a complete story

- A. A complete story has a beginning, and an end.
- B. A story conveys a complete unit of thought.
- C. A story usually contains several scenes.

(1) The transition of scene is through change of time or space.

*Exercises:* Identify the scenes in 1 Samuel 3, 1 Kings 17

(2) A new story also begins with a new scene.

*Examples:* Genesis 22:20; Genesis 24:1.

- D. The preaching text is likely to be longer than other genres.

*Example:* Joshua chapters 3-4

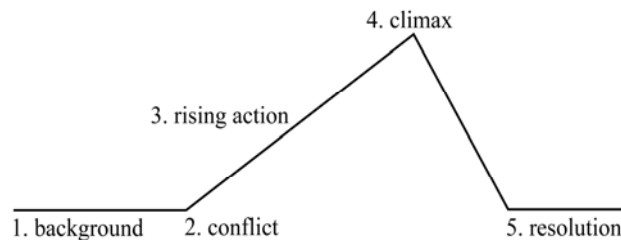
Note: 1 Samuel 3:1, 3:2, 3:15, 3:19; 1 Kings 17:1, 17:5, 17:10, 17:17. I will also point out that each scene may contain a sub-idea (or sub-point) of the central idea of the entire story,

## Slide 20

### Interpreting Biblical Narratives

#### 2. Exegete the story's plot

- A. The five stages of plot



*Exercise:* Analyze the story's plot of the passage assigned.

Note: The story's plot corresponds to the protagonist's experience, which is important in developing the idea of the passage.

## Slide 21

### Interpreting Biblical Narratives

2. Exegete the story's plot (cont'd)
- B. Observe some details in each stage:  
repeated phrases, purpose or causal  
statements, etc.  
*Example: 1 Samuel 2:11-3:1a*
- C. Keep in mind the rhetorical functions of the  
story's plot.

Note: I will ask the students to study 1 Samuel 2:11-3:1a to find any repeated phrases, such as 2:11, 2:18, and 3:1a as well as 2:21 and 2:26a. What is the author's purpose of dispersing these repeated statements? This exercise leads naturally to point C of the slide.

## Slide 22

### Interpreting Biblical Narratives

3. Exegete the story's characters
- A. The major types of characters: protagonist, antagonist, and foil.
  - (1) Protagonist: the primary struggler.
  - (2) The protagonist may not always be morally right.*Examples: Who is the protagonist in 1 Samuel 17, and in 2 Samuel 11?*
- B. The Lord God is always a (or 'the') major character, but often expressed implicitly.  
*Examples: In Ruth, and Esther*

Slide 23

## Interpreting Biblical Narratives

### 3. Exegete the story's characters (cont'd)

#### C. The art of characterization

(1) Dialogue. *Examples:* 1 Samuel 17; Genesis 3:8-12 (particularly v. 12); Genesis 39: 7-18 (v. 7b, vv. 8-9).

(2) Action. *Examples:* Genesis 39:12; Judges 3:12-30.

(3) Titles and names. *Examples:* Joshua 2:1 (Rahab, the prostitute); Ruth 1:20 (Naomi, Mara); Ruth 1:22 (Ruth, the Moabite)

*(Preaching with Variety, chapter 4)*

Note: I will point out, using the examples, that dialogue is the primary way biblical writers tell us about the characters. I will also point out that the description of action is usually brief, but important. So is the title and name.

Slide 24

## Interpreting Biblical Narratives

### 3. Exegete the story's characters (cont'd)

#### C. The art of characterization (cont'd)

(4) Physical description. *Examples:* Genesis 29:17; Genesis 39:6; 1 Samuel 17:4-7.

(5) Authorial comment. *Example:* Numbers 12:3.

(6) Contrast. *Examples:* Judah and Joseph; David and Uriah.

*(Preaching with Variety, chapter 4)*

Note: Physical description is usually rare and brief, but important. So is authorial comment.

Slide 25

## Interpreting Biblical Narratives

4. Exegete the story's setting
  - A. Setting (time/place) evokes our emotional responses, and prompts us to make associations.

*Example 1:* Ruth (1:1)  
the time of judges  
Bethlehem . . . Moab  
famine. . . (but then 1:6b)

*Example 2:* 1 Samuel 25  
now Samuel died (1:1a)  
wilderness (1:1b; also "wilderness" in chapter 24)

*Exercise:* Identify the important information from the story's setting in the passage assigned.

Slide 26

## Preaching Biblical Narratives

1. Arrange the sermon material like a plot

Pay attention to the sermon's "movement" (or "flow")

Conflict → Rising action → Climax → Resolution

Disequilibrium → Analyzing the discrepancy →

Key to resolution → Experiencing the gospel →

Anticipating the consequences (Lowry's "*Homiletical Plot*")



Slide 27

## Preaching Biblical Narratives

### 2. Try induction

#### A. Deductive sermon form

Present the conclusions first, then the specifics.

Start with the whole, then work out the parts.

Show the grand blue print, then the small building blocks.

#### B. Inductive sermon form

Begin with the specifics, then develop into the conclusions.

Start with the parts, then work out the whole.

Sketch the building blocks, then lead to the final structure.

*Questions:* Which form a story would naturally fit into? What are the pro and con of deductive and inductive sermon forms?

Slide 28

## Preaching Biblical Narratives

### 3. “Show” the story with its events, characters and setting.

Capture the various rhetorical functions: suspense, identification, imagination, association.

### 4. Use vivid language.

### 5. Help the audience to “re-experience” the story.

*From Preaching with Variety, chapter 5*

## Slide 29

### Illustrative Sermon (Ruth)

#### 1. Who is the protagonist in the book of Ruth?

- A. Who (Naomi, Ruth) appeared first in the story?  
Who was emphasized at the end of the story?

Ruth 1:2

Ruth 4:14-17 (particularly v.16-17)

- B. Another clue: the number of times Naomi's and Ruth's names appear in the book.

	Naomi	Ruth
Chinese (Union)	29	30
English (NIV)	27	20
Hebrew	20	12

Note: I will explain that point B is a further clue that Naomi is the protagonist in the story. A careful reader should be able to discover this fact as shown in point A, without counting the number of times Naomi's and Ruth's names appear in the book.

## Slide 30

### Illustrative Sermon (Ruth)

Why should we (God's people) praise the Lord  
our God? (using 4:14 as the theme)

1. Because our best plan often falls far short of our expectations. (Ruth chapter 1)
2. Because our God often uses ways beyond our comprehension to save us. (Ruth 2:1-4:15)
3. Because our God's salvation always has a future implication. (Ruth 4:16-22)

## Appendix C

### Course Evaluation

#### Personal Data

Gender: Male\_\_\_\_, Female\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Education: \_\_\_\_\_ Preaching Experiences (yrs.): \_\_\_\_\_

#### I. Please answer the following questions.

1. Having attended this training session, will you increase the frequency of using Old Testament stories in your preaching? Yes \_\_\_\_\_, No \_\_\_\_\_
2. Having attended this training session, will you change the way you prepare sermons from the Old Testament stories? Yes \_\_\_\_\_, No \_\_\_\_\_
3. Please explain your answers to the above questions.

#### II. Please evaluate the following: (If you check “poor,” please provide suggestions for improvement.)

	Excellent	Average	Poor
(1). Course content	_____	_____	_____
(2). Teacher’s presentation/delivery	_____	_____	_____
(3). Illustrations and examples used	_____	_____	_____
(4). Group discussions	_____	_____	_____
(5). Assignments	_____	_____	_____

## Appendix D

**Table 2: Personal Data of Students Attended the Training Course**

Number of students with data gathered	78
Gender Information	Male – 40 Female – 38
Age Information	Below 20 – 1 20 to 29 – 37 30 to 39 – 29 40 to 49 – 10 50 and above – 1
Education Levels	College – 16 Senior high – 21 Junior high – 37 Elementary – 4
Preaching Experiences	1 year or less – 26 2 to 5 years – 17 6 to 10 years – 21 11 to 15 years – 7 16 to 20 years – 5 21 years or more – 2

## Appendix E

**Table 3: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on Genesis 22:1-19  
From Group I Students**

	<b>Sermon Outline (Genesis 22:1-19)</b>
Student I-1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The arrangement of God in the testing of Abraham (v. 1-7).</li> <li>2. The provision of God in the testing of Abraham (v. 8-14).</li> <li>3. The blessing of God in the testing of Abraham (v. 15-19).</li> </ol>
Student I-2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Testing revealed Abraham's faith in God (v. 1-6).</li> <li>2. Testing revealed Isaac's obedience towards his father (v. 7-10).</li> <li>3. Testing revealed God's provision and blessing (v. 11-19).</li> </ol>
Student I-3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The testing from God (v. 1-2).</li> <li>2. The action of faith (v. 3-10).</li> <li>3. The substitute of a lamb (v. 11-14).</li> <li>4. The promise of blessing (v. 15-19).</li> </ol>
Student I-4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The offering of Isaac was God's test of Abraham (v. 1-2).</li> <li>2. The offering of Isaac was Abraham's obedience to God (v. 3-10).</li> <li>3. The final result of Abraham's obedience (v. 11-19).</li> </ol>
Student I-5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. God speaks to man (v. 1-2).</li> <li>2. Obedience to God's word will result in action (v. 3-14).</li> <li>3. Obedience to God's word will bring blessing (v. 15-19).</li> </ol>
Student I-6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The demand of God (v. 1-2).</li> <li>2. The obedience of Abraham (v. 3-5).</li> <li>3. Abraham believed that God would provide (v. 6-10).</li> <li>4. The provision of God (v. 11-14).</li> <li>5. The blessing of God (v. 15-19).</li> </ol>
Student I-7	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Abraham received God's instruction by faith (v. 1-2).</li> <li>2. Abraham offered Isaac by faith (v. 3-14).</li> <li>3. Abraham obtained God's promise of blessing by faith (v. 15-19).</li> </ol>

**Table 4: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on Joshua 3-4  
From Group II Students**

	<b>Sermon Outline (Joshua 3:1-4:24)</b>
Student II-1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We should walk the path of obedience (3:1-13).</li> <li>2. We should walk the path of faith (3:14-17).</li> <li>3. We should walk the path of remembrance (4:1-24).</li> </ol>
Student II-2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Israelites obeyed God's instructions before crossing the Jordan (3:1-13).</li> <li>2. The Israelites carried God's Ark when crossing the river (3:14-17).</li> <li>3. The Israelites set up the stones as a memorial after crossing the river (4:1-24).</li> </ol>
Student II-3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Israelites crossed the river by faith (3:1-17).</li> <li>2. The Israelites set up the stones as a memorial (4:1-24).</li> </ol>
Student II-4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Israelites crossed the Jordan River (chapter 3).</li> <li>2. The Israelites set up the stones as a memorial (chapter 4).</li> </ol>
Student II-5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The chosen people received the Lord's instructions (3:1-13).</li> <li>2. The chosen people obeyed the Lord's instructions (3:14-17).</li> <li>3. The chosen people set up stones as a memorial (4:1-24).</li> </ol>
Student II-6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The testing of faith: crossing the Jordan river (3:1-17).</li> <li>2. The testimony of faith: setting up the stones (4:1-24).</li> </ol>
Student II-7	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. God's instructions before crossing the river (3:1-13).</li> <li>2. God's power when crossing the river (3:14-17).</li> <li>3. Choosing of twelve men among the people (4:1-7).</li> <li>4. The Israelites set up twelve stones in the river (4:8-10).</li> <li>5. All people crossed the river (4:11-18).</li> <li>6. The Israelites set up twelve stones in Gilgal (4:19-24).</li> </ol>
Student II-8	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The preparations before crossing the river (3: 1-13).</li> <li>2. The Israelites crossed the river as commanded (3:14-17).</li> <li>3. The Israelites set up 12 stones as a memorial after crossing the river (4:1-24).</li> </ol>

**Table 5: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on Joshua 9:1-27  
From Group III Students**

	<b>Sermon Outline (Joshua 9:1-27)</b>
Student III-1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Gibeonites lied to the Israelites with a ruse (v. 1-15).</li> <li>2. Joshua made a treaty with the Gibeonites (v. 15-21).</li> <li>3. The Gibeonites were under a curse to serve forever (v. 22-27).</li> </ol>
Student III-2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Gibeonites resorted to a ruse (v. 1-13).</li> <li>2. The Israelites failed to inquire of the Lord (v. 14-15).</li> <li>3. The Israelites should not honor the treaty with the Gibeonites (v. 16-21).</li> <li>4. The Israelites suffered a real loss (v. 22-27).</li> </ol>
Student III-3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Israelites were tricked by the Gibeonites (v. 1-13).</li> <li>2. The Israelites acted foolishly (v. 14-21).</li> <li>3. The Israelites ended up with a long-term threat (v. 22-27).</li> </ol>
Student III-4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Gibeonites lied that they came from a faraway place.</li> <li>2. The Gibeonites succeeded to make a treaty with the Israelites.</li> <li>3. The Gibeonites became slaves to serve for the Lord's house.</li> </ol>
Student III-5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The ruse of the Gibeonites (v. 1-13).</li> <li>2. The foolishness of the Gibeonites (v. 14-21).</li> <li>3. The loss of the Gibeonites (v. 22-27).</li> </ol>
Student III-6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Gibeonites lied to the Israelites (v. 1-13).</li> <li>2. The Israelites failed to inquire of the Lord (v. 14-15).</li> <li>3. The Israelites honored the treaty with a wrong attitude (v. 16-20).</li> <li>4. The Israelites suffered a long term loss (v. 21-27).</li> </ol>
Student III-7	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Believers should be alert since the enemy will resort to lies.</li> <li>2. Believers should be alert since the enemy's scheme will succeed.</li> <li>3. Believers should be alert otherwise they will enslave the enemy.</li> </ol>
Student III-8	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kings west of the Jordan gathered to make war with Joshua(v. 1-2).</li> <li>2. The ruse of the Gibeonites and the negligence of the Israelites (v. 3-15).</li> <li>3. The regret of the Israelites (v. 16-21).</li> <li>4. The Gibeonites became the slaves of the Israelites (v. 22-27).</li> </ol>

**Table 6: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on Ruth  
From Group IV Students**

	<b>Sermon Outline (Ruth)</b>
Student IV-1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The choice of Ruth.</li> <li>2. The work of Ruth.</li> <li>3. The obedience of Ruth.</li> <li>4. The reward of Ruth.</li> </ol>
Student IV-2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ruth encountered suffering and entered the city of Boaz(chapter 1).</li> <li>2. Ruth received comfort as she entered the fields of Boaz (chapter 2).</li> <li>3. Ruth received promise as she entered the threshing floor of Boaz (chapter 3).</li> <li>4. Ruth received redemption as she entered the house of Boaz(chapter 4).</li> </ol>
Student IV-3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ruth encountered hardship but still followed her mother-in-law.</li> <li>2. Ruth worked hard to glean the grain.</li> <li>3. Ruth obeyed the instruction of her mother-in-law.</li> <li>4. Ruth married a new husband and gave birth to a son.</li> </ol>
Student IV-4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The faith of Ruth was beautiful (1:16-17).</li> <li>2. The love of Ruth was beautiful (1: 14).</li> <li>3. The diligence of Ruth was beautiful (1:22; 2:2-3).</li> <li>4. The obedience of Ruth was beautiful (3:5).</li> <li>5. The final ending of Ruth was beautiful (4:13-17).</li> </ol>
Student IV-5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Naomi in hardship (chapter 1).</li> <li>2. Ruth- the younger daughter-in-law of Naomi (chapter 2).</li> <li>3. The kind Naomi (chapter 3).</li> <li>4. Naomi was blessed (chapter 4).</li> </ol>
Student IV-6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Naomi encountered hardship and returned with Ruth (chapter 1).</li> <li>2. Naomi introduced Ruth to Boaz (chapter 2).</li> <li>3. Naomi suggested the marriage of Ruth and Boaz (3:1-4:12).</li> <li>4. Naomi regained happiness (4:13-22).</li> </ol>
Student IV-7	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From pleasantness to bitterness (chapter 1).</li> <li>2. From bitterness to pleasantness (chapters 2-4).</li> </ol>



**Table 7: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11  
From Group V Students**

	<b>Sermon Outline (1 Samuel 1:1-2:11)</b>
Student V-1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The family situation of Hannah (1:1-8).</li> <li>2. The prayer and vow of Hannah (1:9-18).</li> <li>3. The result of Hannah's prayer (1:19-28).</li> <li>4. The thanksgiving and praise of Hannah (2:1-11).</li> </ol>
Student V-2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hannah was irritated with her hardship in the family (1:1-8).</li> <li>2. Hannah prayed earnestly to God (1:9-12).</li> <li>3. Hannah persisted even though she was mistaken as drunk (1:12-18).</li> <li>4. Hannah received blessing and fulfilled her vow (1:19-28).</li> <li>5. Hannah joyfully praised the Lord (2:1-11).</li> </ol>
Student V-3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The prayer of Hannah (1:1-18).</li> <li>2. Hannah was blessed by the Lord to have a son (1:19-23).</li> <li>3. The offering and praise of Hannah (1:24-2:11).</li> </ol>
Student V-4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The tearful prayer (1:10).</li> <li>2. The unceasing prayer. (1:12).</li> <li>3. The earnest prayer (1:15).</li> </ol>
Student V-5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A spiritual mother is molded out of hardship (1:1-20).</li> <li>2. A spiritual mother is willing to offer her most love (1:21-28).</li> <li>3. A spiritual mother knows to worship and praise God (2:1-11).</li> </ol>
Student V-6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Elkanah and his two wives (1:1-8).</li> <li>2. The prayer of Hannah (1:9-18).</li> <li>3. The prayer of Hannah was answered (1:19-20).</li> <li>4. Hannah offered her son to fulfill the vow (1:21-28).</li> <li>5. The song of Hannah (2:1-11).</li> </ol>
Student V-7	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hannah was provoked (1:1-8).</li> <li>2. Hannah prayed before God (1:9-18).</li> <li>3. Hannah was remembered by God (1:19-28).</li> <li>4. Hannah gave thanks to God (2:1-11).</li> </ol>
Student V-8	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hannah was irritated since she had no children (1:1-8).</li> <li>2. Hannah prayed to God and made a vow (1:9-18).</li> <li>3. Hannah's prayer was answered and she fulfilled her vow (1:19-28).</li> <li>4. Hannah's praise and thanksgiving after offering her son (2:1-11).</li> </ol>

**Table 8: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on 1 Samuel 3:1-21**  
**From Group VI Students**

	<b>Sermon Outline (1 Samuel 3:1-21)</b>
Student VI-1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The preparation before raising up Samuel (v. 1-3).</li> <li>2. The call for raising up Samuel (v. 4-18).</li> <li>3. The affirmation after raising up Samuel (v. 19-21).</li> </ol>
Student VI-2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The condition prior to Samuel received revelations (v. 1-3).</li> <li>2. The calling as Samuel received revelations (v. 4-18).</li> <li>3. The result after Samuel received revelations (v. 19-21).</li> </ol>
Student VI-3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The ministry of Samuel before Eli (v. 1-3).</li> <li>2. The ministry of Samuel before the Lord (v. 4-18).</li> <li>3. The ministry of Samuel before the Israelites (v. 19-21).</li> </ol>
Student VI-4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. God revealed himself to Samuel (v. 1-10).</li> <li>2. God declared the outcome of Eli's family (v. 11-18).</li> <li>3. God raised up Samuel as a prophet (v. 19-21).</li> </ol>
Student VI-5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The background of Samuel's receiving revelations (v. 1-3).</li> <li>2. The process of Samuel's receiving revelations (v. 4-10).</li> <li>3. The content of Samuel's receiving revelations (v. 11-14).</li> <li>4. The outcome of Samuel's receiving revelations (v. 15-21).</li> </ol>
Student VI-6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The time of darkness (v. 1-3).</li> <li>2. God raised up Samuel (v. 4-18).</li> <li>3. God affirmed Samuel (v. 19-21).</li> </ol>
Student VI-7	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We should take heed not to follow Eli's footstep.</li> <li>2. We should follow the example of Samuel.</li> </ol>
Student VI-8	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The background before God revealed himself to Samuel (v. 1-3).</li> <li>2. God revealed to Samuel repeatedly (v. 4-14).</li> <li>3. Samuel announced the prophecy concerning Eli (v. 15-18).</li> <li>4. The Israelites recognized that Samuel was a prophet (v. 19-21).</li> </ol>
Student VI-9	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Lord called Samuel (v. 1-9).</li> <li>2. The Lord revealed to Samuel (v. 10-18).</li> <li>3. The Lord affirmed Samuel as a prophet (v. 19-21).</li> </ol>

**Table 9: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on 1 Samuel 25:1-42**  
**From Group VII Students**

	<b>Sermon Outline (1 Samuel 25:1-42)</b>
Student VII-1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Abigail prevented the bloodshed by her wisdom.</li> <li>2. Abigail saved her household by her wisdom.</li> <li>3. Abigail affirmed David's kingship by her wisdom.</li> <li>4. Abigail sought the king's favor by her wisdom.</li> </ol>
Student VII-2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nabal was foolish to pay David back evil for good (v. 1-13).</li> <li>2. Abigail was wise to turn back David's anger (v. 14-31).</li> <li>3. David was humble to accept Abigail's request (v. 32-35).</li> <li>4. Abigail was blessed to gain David's favor (v. 36-42).</li> </ol>
Student VII-3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nabal paid David back evil for good (v. 1-13).</li> <li>2. Abigail turned back David's anger with wisdom (v. 14-35).</li> <li>3. The maidservant was blessed to be king's wife (v. 36-42).</li> </ol>
Student VII-4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The lesson for Nabal: paying back evil for good.</li> <li>2. The lesson for Nabal: unaware of coming danger.</li> <li>3. The lesson for Nabal: refusing to repent.</li> </ol>
Student VII-5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nabal angered David by paying back evil for good (v. 1-22).</li> <li>2. God turned back David's anger with Abigail's request (v. 23-35).</li> <li>3. God upheld justice by striking Nabal (v. 36-42).</li> </ol>
Student VII-6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. David sought Nabal's help in time of trouble (v. 1-13).</li> <li>2. Abigail requested David's favor not to revenge (v. 14-35).</li> <li>3. Nabal was struck and Abigail was blessed (v. 36-42).</li> </ol>
Student VII-7	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nabal angered David by paying back evil for good (v. 1-13).</li> <li>2. Abigail turned back David's anger with wisdom (v. 14-35).</li> <li>3. Nabal was struck and David married Abigail (v. 36-42).</li> </ol>
Student VII-8	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The reason for patience - other will pay us evil for good (v. 1-12).</li> <li>2. The method of patience - do not depend on flesh (v. 13-35).</li> <li>3. The result of patience – God will uphold justice (v. 36-42).</li> </ol>

**Table 10: Pre-training Sermon Outlines on Daniel 1**  
**From Group VIII Students**

	<b>Sermon Outline (Daniel 1)</b>
Student VIII-1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The unchanging service to God in changing environment (v. 1-5).</li> <li>2. The unchanging heart with changed name (v. 6-7).</li> <li>3. The unchanging life style in changed treatment (v. 8-16).</li> <li>4. The unchanging grace in changing culture (v. 17-21).</li> </ol>
Student VIII-2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Be steadfast in faith (v. 1-15).</li> <li>2. Be consecrated in lifestyle (v. 8-16).</li> <li>3. Bring glory to the Lord (v. 17-21).</li> </ol>
Student VIII-3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Daniel and his friends were handsome and knowledgeable (v. 1-7).</li> <li>2. Daniel and his friends resolved not to defile themselves (v. 8-13).</li> <li>3. Daniel and his friends were exalted (v. 14-21).</li> </ol>
Student VIII-4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Daniel and his friends were faithful even in exile (v. 1-7).</li> <li>2. Daniel and his friends resolved not to defile themselves (v. 8-13).</li> <li>3. Daniel and his friends glorified the Lord God (v. 14-21).</li> </ol>
Student VIII-5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Daniel and his friends were chosen to be trained to serve the king (v. 1-7).</li> <li>2. Daniel and his friends resolved not to defile themselves (v. 8-16).</li> <li>3. Daniel and his friends were blessed with extra wisdom (v. 17-21).</li> </ol>
Student VIII-6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Believers should always be faithful, because our environments were ordained by God (v. 1-16).</li> <li>2. Believers should always be faithful, because God's grace will grant us a good ending (v. 17-21).</li> </ol>
Student VIII-7	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. God delivered his people into the hand of Babylon (v. 1-4).</li> <li>2. Daniel and his friends faced the danger of being influenced by foreign culture (v. 5-7).</li> <li>3. Daniel and his friends resolved not to defile themselves (v. 8-16).</li> <li>4. God granted Daniel and his friends wisdom to serve before the king (v. 17-21).</li> </ol>

**Table 11: Sermon Outlines from Groups I to VIII after the Training Course**

	<b>Sermon Outline</b>
Group I (Genesis 22:1-19)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sometimes God tests us because testing may reveal the reality of our obedience and faith.</li> <li>2. Sometimes God tests us because testing may lead to our experiencing that God will provide.</li> <li>3. Sometimes God tests us because testing may further result in God's affirming his blessing on us.</li> </ol>
Group II (Joshua 3:1-4:24)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. God performs miracles to show his presence with us.</li> <li>2. God performs miracles to demonstrate his power before us.</li> <li>3. God performs miracles to make us faithful witnesses for him.</li> </ol>
Group III (Joshua 9:1-27)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We may never avoid unintentional mistakes since there is much deception in this world.</li> <li>2. We are to remain faithful even in our mistakes, since we should be concerned with our God's honor.</li> <li>3. We can trust God that he can still bring forth his grace even out of our mistakes.</li> </ol>
Group IV (Ruth)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The repentance in the midst of suffering.</li> <li>2. The faith in the midst of suffering.</li> <li>3. The turning around in the midst of suffering.</li> <li>4. The comfort at the end of suffering.</li> </ol>
Group V (1 Samuel 1:1-2:11)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The grace of God often comes to us after our hardship.</li> <li>2. The grace of God is to lead us love Him more.</li> <li>3. The grace of God is to cause us glorify Him.</li> </ol>
Group VI (1 Samuel 3:1-21)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. God's word is precious, thus he does not commit his word to those who do not honor him.</li> <li>2. God's word is precious, thus he raises up his servants to declare his word.</li> <li>3. God's word is precious, thus he demands everyone to obey his word.</li> <li>4. God's word is precious, thus he brings his word to fulfillment.</li> </ol>
Group VII (1 Samuel 25:1-42)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do not take revenge, even though it is our right to do so.</li> <li>2. Do not take revenge, for God will carry out the judgment.</li> </ol>
Group VIII (Daniel 1)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We should trust God, for he is sovereign over all things including our hardship.</li> <li>2. We should trust God, for he can protect us even in our difficult trials.</li> <li>3. We should trust God, for he will grant his people blessing in the end.</li> </ol>

## Appendix F

**Table 12: Summary Data of Student Ratings on the Training Course**

<b>Ratings</b> <b>Category</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>
<b>Course Content</b>	66	11	1
<b>Teacher's Presentation</b>	67	9	2
<b>Illustrations, examples</b>	68	10	0
<b>Group Discussions</b>	37	29	12
<b>Assignments</b>	55	20	3

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## VITA

The author of this thesis is Hong Chan, born October 7, 1955 in Taichung, Taiwan. In 1977, he graduated from National Taiwan University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemical Engineering. He came to the United States of America for his graduate study at the University of Texas at Austin in 1979. It was at that time that Hong first heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was then baptized in January 1980 at Hyde Park Baptist Church. It was also during those wonderful days in Austin that Hong met and fell in love with Linda Meilin Liu. They were married on December 11, 1981.

After receiving his Ph.D. degree in Chemical Engineering in 1983, Hong moved to New Jersey. Hong and Linda began building their family, while working in their respective professions. They also joined Rutgers Community Christian Church in Somerset, NJ, and began to serve in a variety of ministries there. In 1989, Hong and Linda first sensed the possibility of being called into full time Christian ministry. In 1991, Hong left his profession as a Chemical Engineer and began his theological study. He received M.A. in Missiology from Westminster Theological Seminary (1994), and later on from Biblical Theological Seminary, M. Div. (2000) and Th. M. (2003). He expects to receive his Doctor of Ministry degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in May 2007.

Hong is an ordained pastor at Rutgers Community Christian Church where he is now the Mandarin Pastor. He also spent one year of his sabbatical leave in 2000-2001, with his family, helping to build-up a couple of Chinese churches in South Germany.

Hong and Linda have three children, Stephanie, Christine and John Paul; and a nine-year old yellow Labrador, Sunnie. They now live in Piscataway, New Jersey.